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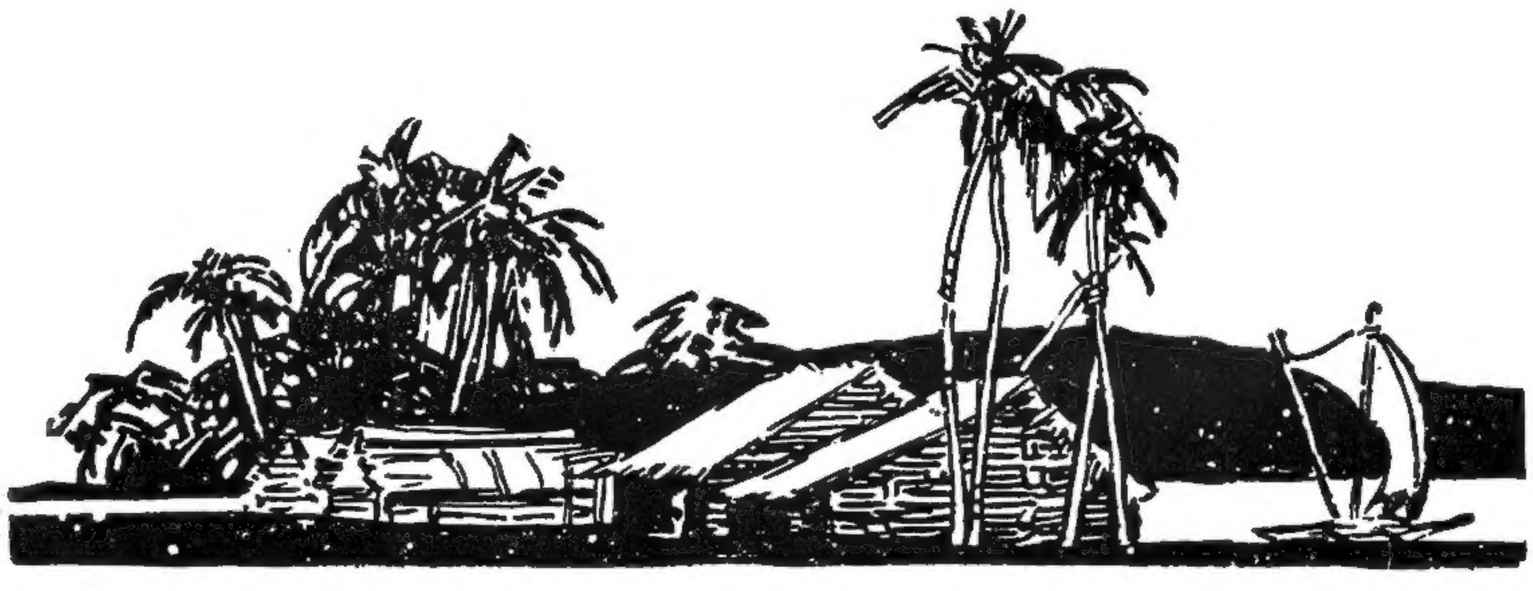

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 92. No. 1 — MAY 1, 1935 — Twice a Month

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They wallowed off Salamis—the grain ships of Cleopatra, prey for the sea wolves that prowled that treacherous coast. And to Tros of Samothrace the queen had come, with the summons that all men dreaded and none dared disobey. "Find them, get them through safely, or the legions of starving Rome will be at our very throats!"

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Cover: John Newton Howitt — *Illustrations: N. O'Keeffe, V. E. Pyles, Ray Dean*

Howard V. L. Bloomfield, Editor

Published twice a month by Popular Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary. Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as Second Class Matter, August 21, 1934, at the Post Office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Yearly subscription $3.00 in advance. Single copy, 15 cents. Foreign postage, $2.00 additional.

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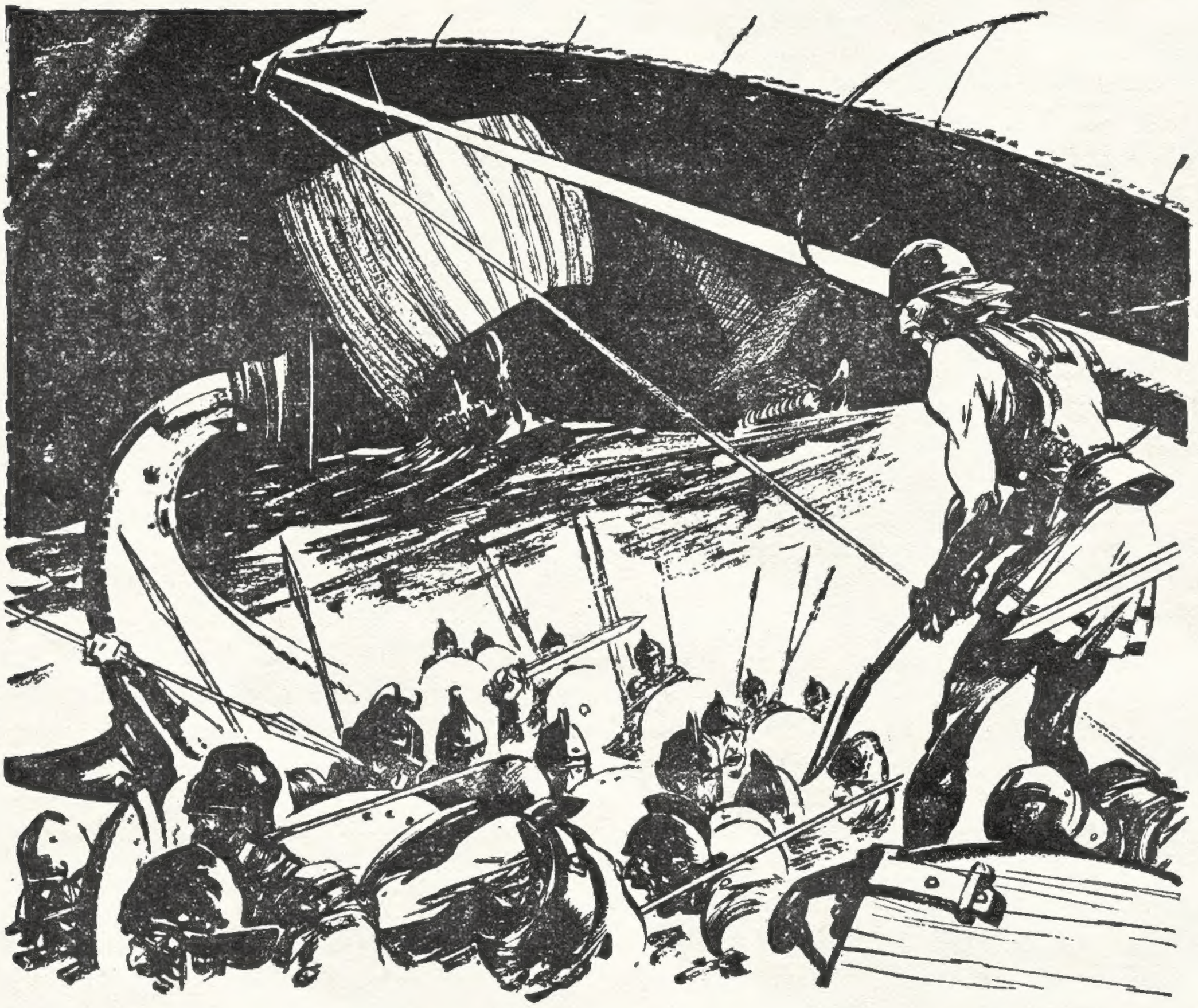


BATTLE STATIONS!

CHAPTER I

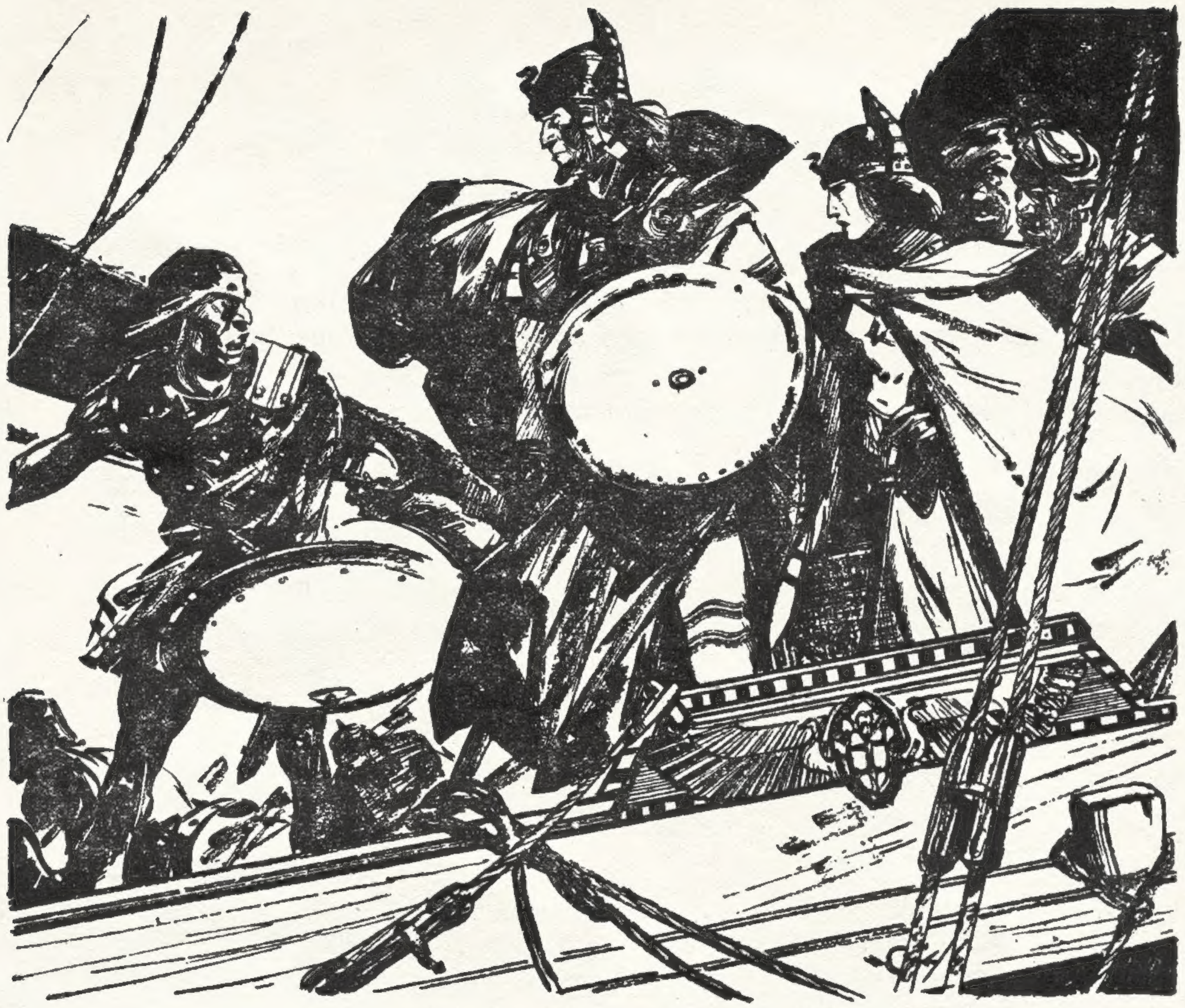
ALEXANDRIA, B. C. 43

THERE was a murmur of voices from the huge throne-room; it sounded as distant as the murmur of the sea through the open window. Charmion and Iras, Cleopatra's confidantes, had been dismissed an hour ago. Tros, in his gold-embroidered purple cloak, stood staring through the window at his great trireme anchored in the harbor. Two deaf mutes, one by each doorpost, watched him; they were as motionless as mummies.

Cleopatra, heavy with emeralds but simply dressed in white, sat in the ivory chair that Caesar had always used. Her elbow rested on the small table beside her, and her chin on her hand. Her eyes glowed with intelligence; but in that pose she was not very good-looking, and she was so small that she looked almost unimportant. But she was the only person in the world who could make Tros obey, because she was clever enough to understand the secret of his strength of character.

After a minute's silence she spoke, and he had to turn and face her. Her voice, low-pitched, quiet, had astonishing vibrance.

"You call yourself my friend, and it is true you have served me well, when it has pleased your tempestuous heart—if it *is* a heart that beats within you, and not a battle-drum. But a queen has no



A novelette by TALBOT MUNDY

friends. It is for a queen to discover, if she can, why people wish to seem to be her friends. I don't know why you have refused to accept office. I would have made you admiral of all my ships—"

"As a friend," he answered, "I am a free man." But he noticed the smile in her eyes. "As an admiral, I should have to leave my conscience in your keeping, Royal Egypt. I have seen the skill with which you use men's consciences!"

"Such as have any," she answered. "Well, you fume and lecture me, and reject my offers. You appear to think I should be proud to obey your fantastic advice, as you call it, that you hurl at me like something or other from one of your trireme's catapults. But I know one thing that you crave, and that you can't have without first doing as I bid you. Now, will you have a commission? See, I have it here, ready—admiral—"

"No," he answered.

"Then begone without one!"

He bowed. She smiled, then laughed —a gorgeous, golden note, resonant with courage.

"And I wish I were coming with you!"

He bowed again. Not for one second did he doubt she was telling the truth about that—she, who had once led her own army and compelled obedience from men who were born to the game of lead-who-can and serve-who-must.

"Good fortune, Tros! No need to tell you to be brave!"

He kissed her hand, and as he left the room she threw a cushion at him:

"Flatterer! You behave as if I were

heartless. I am unworthy of the compliment!"

He went out laughing, which was what she intended. The long line of notables waiting for an audience, in the heavily carpeted marble corridor, with their backs to the Babylonian hangings, exchanged glances, drew conclusions, were jealous and suspiciously polite. They hated Tros because the queen almost never kept him waiting, and because he could not be bribed, and because nobody knew how much he knew. But they feared him, because it was time for somebody to step into dead Caesar's shoes, and it was commonly believed that Tros perhaps might be that man.

Rumor credited him with being the queen's lover, although there were plenty of people who doubted, and even some who knew he was not. But he was known to be closer in the queen's confidence than anyone else except Lady Charmion. He lived on his trireme, where he received all sorts of strange visitors, some of whom were undoubtedly spies. He could not be spied upon by Alexandrines because his ship was too well guarded, and because he knew as many languages as Cleopatra did—some said seventeen—and could always converse without an interpreter. If you can't bribe or torture the interpreter there is not much chance of learning what a captain has discussed in the privacy of his own cabin.

SO Tros was a mystery, although he was an outspoken man when he did speak, and the history of his connection with Alexandria was an open book. At the time when Cleopatra was driven from the throne by the palace clique that favored Arsinoe and her young brother Ptolemy, and had fled to Syria and borrowed an army from her cousin Herod—and Pompey the Great was murdered on an Egyptian beach—and Caesar, swooping into Alexandria with a few ships and a couple of legions, occupied the royal palace, it was Tros with his trireme who brought Cleopatra to Alexandria, although he had no hand in introducing her to Caesar. Appolodorus, the Sicilian had done that, bringing her ashore in a fishing boat, rolled up in some Syrian rugs, and unrolling her at Caesar's feet as nearly naked as was necessary to arouse Caesar's immediate interest.

Appolodorus had died a natural death not too long afterward. In Alexandria, under the Ptolemies, it had never been unnatural that a man should die secretly and suddenly who boasted of having been the queen's lover. But Tros, who may have listened, certainly had never honored rumor even by denying that he and the queen were on terms of amorous intimacy. He never even discussed the open secret, well authenticated, that the lady Charmion had offered herself to him, and not hated him like poison because he had bluntly rejected the offer.

There was not a notable in all that long corridor who had not heard how Tros built his trireme in an improbable country called Britain. But Alexandrines were not much interested in anything outside Alexandria. They liked to know the news from Rome, because Rome was their greatest ready-money market and their deadliest political danger. They hardly ever even visited their Egyptian estates, whence their affluent revenues came. They didn't know Egypt; they knew Alexandria, with its marble colonnaded streets, library, temples, lighthouse, theatres, schools of philosophy, chariot races, gardens, vivacity, women—and that was enough.

It was a symptom of Tros' unfitness to be an Alexandrine, that he believed the world was round and wished to sail around it. That was a source of obscene jests, songs and belly-laughter, for the Alexandrines prided themselves on their ready wit; people even trained their slaves to sing slanderous songs outside their neighbors' windows. There were

at least ten songs about Tros being currently sung wherever people gathered to amuse one another.

However, nobody laughed as Tros strode down the corridor. He was a rather awe-inspiring man at close quarters. Alexandrines affected to despise warriors, because war was in bad taste and not worth the expense. But in order to despise Tros one would have had to be able to meet his gaze without flinching. Nobody had been able to poison him or to have him stabbed in the dark. To kill him one would have to fight him; and not even among the officers of the Egyptian army—incredible collection of adventurers, soldiers of fortune and swashbuckling braggarts from almost every known country on earth—was there a man who would have cared to meet Tros in single combat. He was in the prime of life, probably something more than thirty years old; but it was difficult to judge the age of a man who had such thoughtful and mysteriously lambent eyes.

At the head of the magnificent malachite stairway a palace servant returned him his sword—a heavier, longer sword than any other man in Egypt could have used; when he had hitched that to his golden belt it was small wonder that men yielded him all the room he wanted on the stairs. He strode down, looking almost as if he owned the palace.

Whatever her motive. Cleopatra had seen fit to command that he should be honored; and there never had been a court on earth more capable than hers of wearing a man's patience with the solemn nonsense of ritual. There were salutes and formal farewell speeches by bedizened courtiers, who made an art of insincerity and who could barb politeness with the sly smile that gives it the lie.

Tros looked competent and almost willing to take them by the scruffs of their conceited necks and crash their heads together, but he governed his anger and made the proper formal responses to their wishes for a successful voyage.

Palace officials, studiously dilatory because they knew he was raging to be gone, strolled beside him through the splendid garden to the guardhouse at the palace gate; and there was one more last solemnity of trumpets and clashing arms. Ten minutes of final formal speeches and insolent handshakes, then away at last, behind a Macedonian officer and forty plumed stalwarts cloaked with leopard-skin—eight drums—a dozen trumpets—and at least a dozen sarcastic exquisites to keep Tros company as far as the royal wharf and make him miserable with their palace-sharpened malice.

But at the royal wharf they left him. Tros strode on, but not alone. The guardsmen were not pleased to be out of barracks. There was always a noisy crowd in Alexandria, especially on a fine spring morning along the magnificent waterfront. The guard made no effort to keep the crowd from swarming around Tros, now that the courtiers, who might have reported them for neglect of duty, were gone.

THERE were scores of ex-Roman soldiers, some of them deserters and some of them the destitute veterans whom Gabinius had left in Egypt to fend for themselves, after they had reestablished Cleopatra's drunken father on the throne. When old Ptolemy died, people remembered what they had had to endure from those soldiers, so they were out of luck.

They all wanted berths on Tros' ship, no matter what his business might be, but piracy preferred. Anything for a leader. Anything for a few coins to jingle, and food, and the right to style themselves again *miletes*. Some of them displayed scars on their breasts in proof of bravery; one of them declared he had

been the orderly of Pompey the Great.

Tros advised them to join the Egyptian army, which welcomed all sorts of foreigners and deserters and even runaway slaves. At that they showed their teeth and went away grumbling; the lower ranks of the Egyptian army were no temptation, even to destitute men, who had once marched with the Roman Eagles; it was no fun for a Roman to be whipped by Greek officers.

There were touts with monkeys and parrots for sale. There were people who offered to pray in the temples for the success of the voyage, at so much a prayer. There were vendors of magical charms for the cure of wounds and scurvy. There were map-sellers, who offered astonishing charts of unknown seas; and men who guaranteed to cast a fortunate horoscope for the voyage, as if a guess could guide destiny. There were women who wanted to touch Tros' cloak. It was common knowledge that he had held Caesarion, the queen's son, in his arms on the day the child was born. And was Caesarion not already accorded recognition as a god, as Caesar, his reputed father, had been? Surely, Tros' cloak must be a charm for human fertility. There were women who offered themselves for the voyage; crimps, who knew of a drunken crew who could be dragged aboard in broad daylight at so much a head; and agents with slaves for sale; and merely curious people by the hundred.

But at last Esias, old and dignified, with two young lusty Jews to help him, struggled his way to Tros' side. Reputed to be the richest man in Alexandria, and though he had privileges and a limited right of approach to the throne, Esias had to exercise discretion. There was no longer a Julius Caesar to treat Jews as Alexander the Great also had treated them. He would not have dared ride in a litter or to be seen in public with a too large following of slaves or personal attendants.

Esias wore the venerable looking robes of a Jewish oligarch, but his manner in public was modest; he was glad of Tros' protection as they followed the royal guards to the southern end of the Heptastadium. There some of Tros' crew were waiting—eight fair-haired Gauls, commanded by a one-eyed Greek named Conops. The useless royal guard looked on while Conops and his boat crew cleared the way, and for half the length of the Heptastadium, to where the boat lay tied to an iron ring, the guard came last and unintentionally made themselves useful, since the crowd could not get past them.

BUT there was another crowd coming from the direction of the enormous Pharos lighthouse; and near the boat there were at least two score strumpets, popinjayed with carmine, the least gainly of them dressed in raggedly gaudy, semi-Oriental clothing and the better looking ones hardly clothed at all. Five of them claimed the one-eyed Conops as their debtor.

They were there to collect. They had their bullies lurking at a discreet distance, and they had their whole scandalous story thoroughly rehearsed and ready for Conops' master's ears. It was the ancient game of pay or be shamed in public. Conops stood them off with his knife, or they would have torn off his little gold earrings. Esias clutched Tros' arm in mingled nervousness and indignation.

But then the royal guard did do its duty. It formed two lines and stood off the crowd from both directions, butt-ending the screaming harridans out of the way. The Gauls scrambled down the steps into the boat and tossed the oars. Conops faced his master, unflinching.

"You dock-rat! You wine-swilling tavern cockroach! You godless, impudent, ill-smelling wastrel!"

"Yes, master."

"What have you done with your pay?"

"I got drunk. I was robbed. And now those wenches try to make out they were virgins and I seduced 'em—me!—that could be trusted with a—"

"Silence, you leper!"

"Yes, master."

Tros gave him a handful of silver coins and with an ominous growl commanded him to fee the victims of his bestiality. He stood then to acknowledge the salute of the royal guard, and when the drum-roll and the trumpet clamor ceased he turned to help old Esias down the steps.

Conops pocketed half the silver, somewhere up under his kilt, and thrust his arm between the guardsmen to give a coin to each of the five obscenely screeching females. Then he followed Tros down the steps, let loose the painter and shoved off, taking his place in the stern at the steering oar. The Gauls, under Tros' eye, rowed like one oarsman and seven shadows, with one inseparable thump of oars on tholes and a swing that made the longboat leap. Conops leaned forward over the back of the stern seat, thrusting his head between Tros and Esias.

"Master."

Tros made a courteous gesture to Esias and slightly turned his head to signify he was listening.

"A man named Lars Tarquinius—"

"The Etruscan? What of him?"

Esias looked startled, Tros irritated.

"He came aboard with a letter saying we are to give him passage. He asks more questions than a court scribe when the torturers put the hooks to a witness."

"Has he been in my cabin?"

"No, master. He said he had leave to sleep there, but I doubled the guard at the cabin door. I told him you reserve your spare bunk for Aphrodite Kallipygos when she's tired o' gods and craves a man to comfort her."

"You scurrilous rogue. Has he examined the war engines?"

"Not he, master. All the paulins are on, and the crews standing by. The new deck decurion, Paniscos, let him kiss the butt-end of a crank-bar, for sticking his nose where it didn't belong. But he'd two teeth missing when he came aboard; so if he lies about it, master, all that happened to him was a cut lip, and now you know."

"The magazines?"

"Nay, nay, master. I drew two chalk lines on the deck and bade him keep between 'em. I told off two young Scythians to treat him rough if he should set toe a skin-breath too far. But I remembered what you've always said about hospitality, so I set a Greek—young Orodes, of the starboard after-catapult—to answer his questions. That's as likely a lad as there is this side o' Charon's ferry, so what the Etruscan hasn't learned by now has a chance to be true; at least the biggest lies 'll all be used up, if I know Orodes."

"THE young puppy dared to lie to me, not long ago, about the grease on the lower trunnions," Tros answered. "I have my eye on him. Well, what next?"

"Nothing, master; only that the Etruscan asked, as it might be casually, which is your scribe that writes letters for you and keeps the ship's accounts, and where does he sleep. So we fetched him up a blackamoor from the lower benches, and we showed him how a blackamoor has a ring in his nose to hang by, in the salt-fish locker, when he isn't writing poetry and love messages from the crew to the queens of foreign lands. And about the queens, too, we told him plenty. But he keeps on asking. And, master, if you should ask me, ours are sea-faring lads and as simple-minded as fish. Sooner or later, unless you clap a hatch on him, he'll find out what he wants to know,

and without us learning what that is until after the harm's done."

"Keep your eye on him. But I'll have no interference with his personal belongings. Mind that. Is his luggage aboard?"

"Yes, master. In the mid-ship deck-house. Two canvas packages, roped and sealed—roped by a landsman. Nothing in them but some clean rolls of papyrus; fish-ink in a bottle; a set of pens; three suits of underwear; a pair of Gaulish trousers; three shawls; two pair of sandals; three changes of Roman street-wear and two red togas, one soiled; a leather bag of money—total, including *staters* and *tetradrachms*, about eighty-three *denarii;* three—no, four tunics, one torn; a bunch of rings tied together with wire, all cheap stuff; two books in wooden boxes; a couple of spoons and a good dagger; lots of bits of cloth to wipe his nose on, some letters—"

Conops paused, about the space of seven oar-strokes. Then, as they neared the great vermilion-sided trireme, and since Tros made no comment, he continued:

"Pausanias was with me and he wrote down what's in one of the letters. It's on your cabin table, underneath the box of books. The Etruscan's luggage is roped and sealed as he fetched it aboard."

The boat entered the trireme's shadow. Conops shouted: "Toss oars, you tow-haired druids—do you think you're fishing?—smart, bow, with the boat-hook—hold her—deck ahoy! Lower the bight of a rope for the merchant Esias."

A trumpet sounded, then a roll of drums. There was a grand metallic thump and crash of arms at the salute, as Tros' head appeared at the top of the boarding ladder. Puzzled, impatient, worried, baffled and involved in invisible toils he might be, but on his own ship he was master—lord of the lives and wills and destinies of men whose pride it was to do his bidding.

CHAPTER II

TROS TAKES COUNSEL WITH ESIAS

THE cabin below the poop was dim, although it was painted with bright colors. The ports, which were slot-shaped and could be closed by bronze shutters and wedged tight, were narrow enough to protect archers aiming at the rowers of an enemy vessel. Across all the openings were bronze brackets for the big yew bows that were stowed in racks against the forward bulkhead, between boxes of bronze-tipped arrows.

There were broad bunks on either side of the cabin; some big chests, heavily hinged and strapped with bronze; a curtained closet where Tros' clothes were hung swinging in bags from a brass rail; and in the midst, with an armchair on each of three sides, was a heavy oak table kept spotless, like the floor, by constant scrubbing. Barbaric embroidered hangings covered the after bulkhead, and the bed-covers on the bunks were of Gaulish wool, dyed woad-blue—almost sky-blue. There was a box of books on the table—consisting of papyrus rolled on wooden sticks, each one thrust, end downward, in a circular container made from a section of bamboo.

Old Esias sat at Tros' right hand, leaning against the chair, with his eyes half-closed, watching Tros' face. His full beard and the locks that fell beneath his almost Arabian head-dress were ash-gray. His aging figure looked frail. But there was a very bright gleam beneath the lowered, wrinkled eyelids.

He was a handsome old man, whose great wealth had not frozen his sense of humor. Slaves, of which he owned hundreds, had not flattered away his judgment or his self-respect. At the age of seventy he could enjoy power, and he plainly had it, of a kind that suited his temperament. But he waited for Tros to speak first, having learned how to

wait, and to think, while kings and their favorites might hurry from one confusion to another. He was much more than a typical Jew of the diaspora; he was an exceptional man in any company, the richest merchant in Alexandria, with connections all over the known world.

A Syrian steward, whose other job, his battle-station, was at one of the starboard arrow-ports, entered and set wine before them, seaman fashion, with brusque courtesy, and two goblets of turquoise blue glass from a Theban tomb, which he took from a chest and unwrapped as carefully as if they were red-hot.

Tros mixed the wine with water and he and Esias sipped, spilling no libation to any one's gods, to the great scandal of the steward, who stood watching them, his lips moving in silent supplication, or perhaps apology to invisible presences, until Tros ordered him to get forward and use his eyes on the dirt on the pantry floor.

"And mark me! Let me see a beetle when I make my rounds, and you shall eat it for supper! Ever let me catch you at prayers before your day's work's done, and you shall see whether praying balms a sore hide! Poseidon's trident! I have fed the shavelings of three temples to pray—aye, and have paid for burnt offerings. Have I shipped a crew of Osirian acolytes? Gods worth praying to love clean ships and diligent men. Fall away. Send in the deck decurion."

Old Esias sipped wine to hide a smile, but Tros noticed.

"A good enough sailor," he said, "but if I would let him he would have me on my knees to half the gods of Homer."

A YOUNG Phoenician, from Sidon, with gold earrings and a knife at his belt, entered and faced Tros at attention. He was kilted like a Greek, in Tros' livery of unbleached cloth with a dyed border of Tyrian blue.

"Post your sentries six full paces from the cabin door with their backs toward it. No eavesdropping, mind. No interruption, except by Conops if he chooses, until I sound the gong."

The Phoenician saluted, fell away and shut the door with a thud. Tros waited until he heard the sentries ground their spear-butts at the proper distance. Then he grinned at Esias.

"Fifty corn ships, Esias! That means how much money?"

The old Jew made a wry face. "Too much. I and my syndicate had to pay higher than last year's price. You know the law of Egypt. Corn is royal revenue —royal monopoly. They won't let us buy from the grower. The queen's new finance minister forced us to buy and to pay in advance."

Tros nodded.

"That thought was the queen's, not his," he answered. "That tricky eunuch would rather have borrowed the money from your people at twenty per cent, for the sake of a half per cent commission on the deal."

Esias corrected him "One per cent! Was there ever a woman of the Ptolemies like this one? Her elder sister Berenice was a wanton who thought of nothing but loans and lovers. She died the death of a Jezebel, and good riddance. Arsinoe, the younger sister, is more beautiful, and in a way more dangerous. Jealous, plotting forever with priests and malcontents. A reckless girl, nursing a grudge and mourning her lost throne. But instead of grieving for dead Caesar, Cleopatra emulates him. She has the grasp of a man and the guile of a woman."

"The courage of a lad," Tros added, "and the imagination of a mystic. A man's love of power, and a woman's sense of man's weakness, but no womanly fears."

"A sphinx," said Esias.

"Aye, but not silent! Cleopatra's voice is a weapon—a sweet-sounding

menace. Her riddle is hidden with laughter. Her moods are beneath the surface of gaiety. Beneath her soft speech and her flattering gentleness there is iron. Beneath her sensuousness there is strength."

"Can you read her riddle?"

"I must, Esias. Her throne hangs by a thread. She will play me like a stake on the board, unless I use intelligence."

"Well, you have it to use," said Esias. "Who is this Etruscan, of whom your man spoke? Do I know him?"

Tros raised the box of books. He withdrew from beneath it a strip of soiled papyrus, on which something had been written hurriedly in Greek characters. He scanned it once and then read it aloud:

> "Ten of the eleven letters in his little leather case are unsigned but addressed to Lars Tarquinius, reporting simply that his letters were received by those for whom they were intended.
>
> "The other letter has been written in a clear hand by a secretary, but the signature is difficult to read. It looks like Gaius Xenobarus, legatus, S.P.Q.R. The letter is short. It says simply: Promises are of no more worth than threats. Neither will the one feed legions, nor the other win battles. Only deeds are worthy of a Roman's consideration. See to it that thou be worthy of my good will."

TROS frowned. "If Xenobarus is, as I think, Ahenobarbus, he commands a Roman squadron—perhaps even a fleet. There is no knowing where to look for him, but he is sure to be on the side of whoever he thinks strong enough to undo in Rome what Caesar did. Ahenobarbus was one of Pompey's captains in the war against the pirates. He led five ships against half a hundred and defeated them all in the Bay of Antioch. You remember? A ruthless victor. They say he crucified so many prisoners that he ran out of trees and nails and they had to cut the lucky last hundred's throats. He was Pompey's man until they murdered Pompey on the Egyptian shore.

"Ahenobarbus always hated Caesar. The obstinate old die-hard believed Pompey meant to re-establish republican rule in Rome. Perhaps that gives you an idea of the man's mentality. As soon as Julius Caesar had made himself all-powerful he had the good sense to let Ahenobarbus and a lot of other men of the same type go into retirement. But the minute Cassius and Brutus and that lot had murdered Caesar, the old dog cropped up again. The unconfirmed report is that he sides with Brutus. If Ahenobarbus is at sea with a squadron, and if I know Ahenobarbus, whichever side he favors will eat your corn! Who then will pay you?" Tros grinned. "The Roman senate?"

"Lord Tros, what are the terms of your commission?" Esias asked.

"I have none."

"Eh? What? You have only the queen's word? A Ptolemy's word? The word of a woman who plays against Rome for a kingdom?"

Tros nodded. "The queen's word, flatteringly murmured in the room with the tortoise-shell walls studded with turquoise, where she and Caesar once talked philosophy and plotted together to conquer the world. The room stank of rose-leaves in Persian jars."

"*Hey-hey-hey!* Lord Tros! A stout heart and a strong ship may prevail over winds and waves. But she—that woman—she had even Caesar in her net!"

Tros laughed. "She has me in a net that never could have held him. Caesar, to gain his larger purposes, would have abandoned a hostage. He often did it. Not I. She has all my Northmen."

"She understands you!" said Esias. "Truly she understands you. A man's scruples can become a bridle and bit to his better judgment."

"Aye," Tros answered. "Not that *she* hasn't scruples."

"Of a sort," said Esias. "Of a sort."

"Feminine," Tros agreed. "But it was another woman who thought of this trick. Cleopatra's ministers were not picked for their righteousness, but a man can reckon with them, servile ingrates though they be. A man can out-think the rogues as readily as she can. But her only intimate is a woman whom none of her ministers dares to offend."

Esias stared, trying to read the thought behind the words. "The Lady Charmion?" he asked. "From a cub that could be petted, she has changed, since Caesar's death, into a she-lion, snarling, mateless. I have heard it said, Lord Tros, and also contradicted, that she loves you. What is the truth of it?"

The stormy look came into Tros' eyes —the hint of red that boded unpredictable but limitlessly angry deeds.

"I am not an appraiser of women's love, Esias."

"But of their hatred? You should have let her love you."

"She has my leave, so be she keeps the talk of it for other ears than mine. It was Charmion's thought to send your corn fleet to sea under escort of the Cyprus warships. Sphaerus, the assistant minister of marine, has been blamed for it. He was her enemy, or she his, no matter which. He ordered what she suggested, and he has now been sent to Berenice to cool himself on the shore of the Red Sea. He may wait there and count the yearly Greek ship from Socotra and the twenty ships from Punt."

"And the meaning of that?" Esias asked. He knew, but he preferred to learn how much Tros did not know.

Tros surprised him. "It means this. The queen's sister, Arsinoe, is queen of Cyprus, but that is a puppet kingdom. She frets and plots in exile, hating Cleopatra to the death for usurping the throne of Egypt—but to an eternity for not having saved her from being made to walk in Caesar's triumph. I saw that. She was in golden chains, half-naked, jeered by the Roman mob. The two sisters love each other like a pair of poets at a competition. However, it was Caesar who made Arsinoe ruler of Cyprus, mainly to annoy old Cato. But Caesar did it, so Cleopatra puts up with it. I think she has convinced herself that Caesar really was a god-upon-earth, and if she can possibly avoid it she won't undo whatever Caesar did. However, Arsinoe's minister, Serapion—you remember Serapion?—big, handsome fellow with a voluptuous smile—is a treacherous fool, who believes he sees his opportunity.

"There is news, to hand this morning by a fast *felucca*, that Serapion has detained your corn ships off Cyprus. They are probably now in the harbor of Salamis. The crews of the escorting warships have declared for Arsinoe, and Serapion has sent them to Sidon, to get in touch with Cassius, who is the Roman proconsul in Syria.

"Serapion is supposed to be urging Cassius to invade Egypt, where there is plenty of corn, plenty of plunder, and to send your fifty shiploads of corn to Rome as his own gift, thus making himself popular in Rome, where he is said to lack sympathy."

"Why should the Lady Charmion wish that?" Esias asked. "Does she love Cassius? I have heard he sours all women with his mean smile. Does she wish to see Arsinoe queen of Egypt?"

"Charmion has never seen Cassius. She wishes first and foremost to convict Arsinoe of treason, for future reference. She hates her. She also hates a Jew as utterly as she detests me. You Jews—and to this the queen agrees, as does half Alexandria—are too rich, too powerful, becoming too ambitious. Your corn can cost the queen nothing. No matter what becomes of it, her treasury has received your money. It would not break her heart to see you and your syndicate bankrupt."

Esias nodded.

"Her estimate," he remarked, "is lack-

ing in imagination. Does the queen not fear Cassius?"

"It might serve the queen's purpose," Tros continued, "if Cassius should get possession of the corn. Cassius may be the coming man. She doubts it. She hates him. He slew her Caesar. But he may be the coming man—he or Brutus —or he and Brutus. She would like to be able to have in hand some sort of evidence that she intended the corn for Cassius and Brutus, just in case they should turn out to be stronger than she believes. But should Caesar's murderers fail to make themselves masters of the Roman world, your corn, if they can seize it, will have helped them to weaken whoever defeats them. The weaker Rome becomes, the stronger will be Egypt. And Cleopatra can blame Arsinoe for having sent supplies to Cassius and Brutus. A good excuse to make an end of her."

"CAT and mousing while Rome starves!" Esias commented. "Rome must not starve! That is the one thing that must not be allowed to happen! Are these women and their courtiers demented? There will come a Roman fleet to Alexandria to subject Egypt to the fate of Gaul, Pontus, Syria, Greece, Carthage! Don't they know that Romans, like wolves, are merciless when famished?"

"Aye, they know it. So the corn fleet lies off Cyprus, or in the harbor of Salamis. And the queen sends me, with a fleet of ten vessels, to fetch it away.

"Ten vessels, Tros? Where are they?"

"God knows, Esias. Somewhere between here and Cyprus, unless they have already joined the other fleet and declared for Arsinoe. She is said to be offering double pay. Or unless they have met with pirates, who are out in fleets again, and growing bold, since Pompey's death. Did you hear that a fleet of them gutted a Roman trireme off the south of Sicily a month ago? Or they may have run from Ahenobarbus. If he were short of provisions Ahenobarbus would fight an Egyptian fleet for its crew's rations!"

"Are the ten ships under your command?" Esias asked.

"No. I am to coöperate, and to deliver the corn to the highest bidder."

Esias answered calmly: "It is my corn —our corn—my syndicate's. It is consigned to my agent in Rome, who is to sell it to the Roman corn commissioners. They await it. They expect it. They need it, to prevent the Roman mob from taking law into its own hands."

"The bids," said Tros, "are to be in terms of good will, not money. The queen does not need money. She needs the friendship of the strongest Roman."

"Which is he?" asked Esias.

Tros, with a gnarled forefinger, drew an invisible map on the oaken table.

"At the western end of the Mediterranean," he began, striking the palm of his hand on the imagined map, "is Lepidus, said to be strong in Gaul, with many legions and perhaps some money, but few provisions, and with vanity and luck in place of brains. An oldish man, Lepidus is probably not dangerous but needs to be borne in mind.

"There, too, Pompey's young son, Sextus, is ravaging Spain for supplies for the ragged remnants of the legions that Caesar overwhelmed at Munda. A very dangerous young man. Sextus has nothing to lose and all to gain by almost any act of daring, and he is rumored to have seized some shipping.

"Here, at the eastern end, is Cassius in Syria, with seven legions; you know him better than I do. A mean man, who would rather injure others than win. He would like to invade Egypt, if only to humiliate Cleopatra for having been great Caesar's mistress. But Syria is in revolt and full of bandits that he would have to leave at his rear, and Brutus urges him to march northward and join him in Macedonia.

"Brutus is scavenging all Asia Minor for corn and money, talking about high principles and burning cities. Brutus knows he will have to fight whatever combination results from the civil war in Italy. He will have to fight either Antony or Octavian, possibly even both of them, if they can only come to terms with each other. So Brutus needs Cassius.

"And meanwhile, in Italy, Marc Antony and Octavian are at each other's throats. Incompatibles, loathing each other, but big men. Mark me: they two are the big ones. Antony is rumored to be having the worst of it. He is said to have won a battle but to have retreated toward Gaul. There is no knowing what has happened. The queen secretly favors Antony, because he was Julius Caesar's friend, and because he dared to denounce Caesar's murderers."

"She has sent him money," said Esias. "She sent him a tenth of a year's revenue of all Egypt. She sent it within six weeks of Caesar's death—within a week of her return from Rome."

"And if I know Antony," said Tros, "he threw away the half of it on wine and women. Nevertheless, the man has something more than a mere appetite. He has faculties, courage, imagination, health, high spirits. He is a great cavalryman. But he is no Julius Caesar. Antony needs a master, or so I suspect."

"WELL? And you—what do you do?" Esias asked.

"I go to sea. Now."

"At your own cost?"

"Aye. Should I accept her wages and become her catspaw? Or should she pay me and become responsible for whatever I do? In a certain sense, Esias, my predicament and hers are as well matched as the Heavenly Twins."

"I perceive what she perhaps—eh, perhaps—perhaps can gain," said Esias. "But, Lord Tros, what can you gain?"

"My men! She has taken hostages—my Northmen, who have stood by me in many a hard fight."

"With your consent?"

"You know me better than that, Esias. But can I fight all Egypt? That again was the Lady Charmion's doing. All my Northmen are at hard labor, somewhere up the Nile, I know not where. The queen wanted them for her bodyguard, but they and I said no to it. So the Lady Charmion snatched an opportunity and had them sentenced for breaking the heads of the Roman officers of those two legions that Caesar left here to keep the queen on her throne. A true charge, but a false reason."

"I was told of it," said Esias. "But it was said they were Gauls."

"My Northmen. The best seamen on earth—battleaxe-men—stubborn, superstitious, hard drinking, grumbling, loyal-to-the-last-breath comrades. The queen was glad enough to have those arrogant Roman cockerels humiliated. They have served her purpose. They might possibly turn against her. They cost more than their insolence justifies and she would be glad to be rid of them. The queen joked me about the thrashing my men gave them, and the flowers that she sent to the injured Romans were arranged in the shape of a Northman's axe.

"But the Lady Charmion saw a chance to clip my wings; she and the queen had second thoughts. Northmen are heavy drinkers and it was no trick to arrange a trap and then a toss-pot quarrel with a company of soldiers. And so now I may have my Northmen back if I succeed on this venture."

"And your Basques?" asked Esias. "Those saucy rogues who obliged me to double the guard over my slave-girls' quarters?"

Tros scowled. "They went on a raid of that kind once too often. They conceived a passion for the wrong man's slaves. They were fortunate not to be sent to the mines. As it is, they were sent to the shore of the Red Sea, to the

Berenice coast patrol, where there are few women and fewer wine-shops."

"So you go to sea short-handed?"

"Short for a sea-fight, yes. I have a good crew—good rowers—good men for the catapults. But if I meet Ahenobarbus I shall sorely lack men for such a battle as that old warrior will force. If he can catch me, you understand. I can out-sail and out-row any Roman ship afloat, except for a few of their *liburnians* that are too lightly armed to be dangerous. There is going to be thick weather, and that is all in my favor."

"April? Thick weather in April?"

"Yes. I can smell it coming. And mark me, Esias, there is always dirty weather when the world's thrones are toppling and men's minds are a turbulent sea. Nay, I know not why. Shake your head as you please. I say it is so. And if I find that corn fleet, I shall have to escort fifty laden ships as slow as logs, in vile weather."

"Egyptian sailors are good," said Esias.

"Good, yes. They can stand the weather. But they can scatter and run like thieves. And if I bully them, they'll surrender to the first Roman in sight and accuse me of being a pirate."

"Which you are!" said Esias. "And this Etruscan with the letters in his luggage?"

"Lars Tarquinius is supposed to be a passenger for any Roman port where I can deliver him. He is supposed to be a spy, acting in behalf of Sostratus, the queen's secretary. He owes his appointment to the Lady Charmion, who would almost give her right hand to see me humiliated.

"But I think Tarquinius is worse than any woman. He is a man with a woman's malice and a woman's lack of scruple. He is like a camel, with incalculable treachery at both ends. He would betray even himself for sufficient reward. I suspect him of having warned Ahenobarbus to look out for that corn fleet and to beware of me."

"Can he swim?" asked Esias.

"I may find a better use for him. And now about money. Esias, I shall soon need money."

"Lord Tros! Lord Tros!" Esias threw up his hands—beautiful old hands, as finely lined as Tros' fists were gnarled and hugely strong. "There has been no market for your pearls. They are too big and too good to be thrown on a market that groans with the loot from Rome's wars and with the unsold Eastern merchandise that gluts the warehouses. We must wait for more prosperous times. But no need to worry about them. They are safe. They are well cared for. My slave-girl, Mariamne, at the proper intervals, cherishes them on her breast to preserve their life and lustre."

"I have no fear on that score," said Tros. "But do you think such a ship as mine, with all my men, costs nothing?"

"I can lend you a little."

"Nay, nay. I could have had a loan from the queen were I so minded. But a borrower, Esias, borrows more than he gets, and pays more than he owes."

"Lord Tros." Esias leaned toward him, pointing a finger. "Should as much as four-fifths of that corn reach my agent through your doing, so that he can sell it instead of its being stolen by a Roman fleet; or if you yourself can sell it, for four-fifths of its value—one-fifth of the money is yours. My word on it. I allow a fifth for spoilage, sinkage, shipwreck, accident or loss from any cause whatever."

"Your word is good, Esias."

"And in writing better." Esias produced a small roll of parchment. "Pen! Ink!"

TROS groped in a box and passed them to him. Esias wrote the terms of the agreement in Greek, and then the same in Latin, on the one parchment.

"There—from Esias, Jew of Alexandria, to the Lord Tros of Samothrace and of the trireme *Liafail*—authority to sell the corn and to receive the money."

"How much money?"

"It is written on the parchment—price, quantity, cost of loading, cost of freight per day from date of sailing, tax on export, harbor charges, interest per day—it is all written plainly. And now, Lord Tros, none can call you a pirate. You are an accredited agent."

"A Roman officer will call me anything he pleases, given a short enough range and a big enough prize!" Tros answered. "I will do my best. But the seas are wide in which to lose a fleet of fifty ships, and it is easier to bargain with Apennine wolves than with famished Romans making war on one another. Should I fail, Esias, I shall still need money, aye, and likely need it worse. I must sell pearls. I have no other resource against future need."

He got up and manipulated the cumbrous lock of a bronze-bound chest. He produced a small gold box, engraved with a barbaric design. He pushed the box along the table toward Esias.

Esias glanced at him for permission, opened the box, gasped, held it to the light from the port behind him. He poked with his forefinger and stared, fascinated.

"I believed I had all your pearls."

"These are the last."

Esias poured eleven pearls into the palm of his hand. Two were as large as pigeons' eggs. One, that was almost as big, was as dark as the sunlit breast of an Ethiopian.

"How many lives, Lord Tros? How many lives?"

"None that I heard of," Tros answered. "I had the other pearls from the druids. These were a gift to me from Fflur, the wife of Caswallon, the king of a corner of Britain. He and she and I were friends and we upheld each other. There were twelve pearls in that lot. I spent the smallest on sending my homesick Britons back to their fog-bound island. Britons are good slaves but bad freedmen, and not Poseidon himself could make sailors of them."

"Lord Tros, who could buy these? There is only one possible purchaser."

"Take those two largest, Esias, and sell them to her!"

"*Hey-hey-hey!* Who shall appraise them? Be advised by me. Give them to her! Sell the others."

"Nay, nay, Esias. I have had my fill of that mistake. I gave her some pearls, to my sorrow. Such gifts excite greed that devours the giver. She would think I am an oyster that can vomit pearls whenever ill used. She would cat-and-mouse me for my last one; and with the last would be gone a boughten tolerance such as ill suits my temper. Gifts are no way to a woman's confidence, not if it be worth having. As it is, she sets a value on me myself. And when I have my men again, she shall either keep Caesar's promise and let me re-dig and widen and deepen that canal that her ancestor dug from the Nile to the Red Sea, and that the other Ptolemies let perish of neglect—or I will sail away."

"Through the Gates of Hercules again? To prove that the world is round?" Esias asked. That was another of Alexandria's standing jokes.

"Aye!" Tros answered, glaring. "I would have gone on that voyage long ago, but for befriending her, and so first one thing, then another. It is my life's goal, and she knows it. But she knows, too, I will not sail away and leave my Northmen. Sell her those pearls, Esias. Enter the amount, less your percentage, to my credit. Pay me when I return. If Ahenobarbus or some other Roman sinks me, and I return not, then the money is yours.

"But remember my Northmen. Remember my Basques. They are all my freedmen—prisoners of war, to whom I gave their freedom. They are good men.

They have stood by me better in foul than fair weather, better in war than in peace, as good men ever will. See that they are not sold into slavery. Bribe—intrigue—use influence—set them at liberty. Send the Basques home in some trading vessel at the first chance. Buy the Northmen a ship and let them find their own way to the land they came from."

"I will do it. You may depend I will do it. And now one word—"

Conops burst in, slamming the door behind him.

"Master—"

"Have you no manners, you graceless drunkard?"

Conops, fuming with impatience, stood at attention and touched his forehead, to Tros first and then to Esias.

"Master—"

"Set that back in the chest."

Conops took the gold box from the table, wrapped it in a cloth, packed it away in the chest, locked it up, tested the lock, and handed the key to Tros.

"And now! What?"

"Master, there's a sixteen-oared boat alongside, full of men and—"

"My boat," said Esias. "I ordered it sent to save you trouble, Lord Tros."

Conops groped in his blouse and laid on the table a small package tied up in linen rag. He had three raw knuckles, which he tried to conceal.

"The merchant Esias' boat, maybe," he remarked. "But the Etruscan has a fish, too, on that skillet. He threw that to a boatman."

Tros untied the package. It contained a folded letter, unsealed.

"Did you hurt him?" he asked.

"Nay, nay, master."

"Does he know you have this?"

"Nay, am I so stupid? I made believe that minute to need to inspect the new flax hawser that's coiled up forward. I set a crew to laying it out on deck on the port side. What with me being hasty, and our lads knowing something was up and acting clumsy, and him in the way, he was discommoded more than any one of his rank should be. So I had to ask him, nice and civil, to keep to starboard of the mid-ship deckhouse, and I set a deck decurion to mind he did it. Then I went after that. But the Etruscan had thrown a coin, too, along with the packet, so the boatmen got nasty—all four bow oars. But I knew which one had it."

"And the coin?"

Conops was silent.

"Show it to me!"

Conops opened his hand.

"O-ho! Silver?"

Tros read the letter. He passed it to Esias and Esias read it. Their eyes met. They nodded. Esias handed it back and Tros put it away. Esias laid on the table ten strips of parchment and an Egyptian government tax receipt.

"And now, Lord Tros, before I leave you, and may God preserve you for a safe return, let me make you a gift. I have ten slaves—"

"Nay, nay, no slaves, Esias. There isn't a slave on the ship. Oar-work breaks slaves' hearts, and a slave in a battle at sea is only one more foe to keep an eye on."

"Lord Tros, these are ten young Jews who fought their way out of Jerusalem when Pompey laid seige to the city. They burst their way by night through the Roman lines. They lived in the mountains until they were surrounded by Roman troops and starved out. They were sold in the Athens slave-mart, thence to Delos, where they were trained as gladiators and sold to Ephesus, whence they escaped. They reached Tarsus and went to sea as rowers on a pirate vessel. The pirate broke faith with them and sold them to my agent in Rhodes, who sent them in fetters to Alexandria. I offer them to you, from a friend to a friend, as the best gift I can make to you, and the greatest kindness I can do for them. These are the deeds

to them. This is the receipt for the tax on the transfer of ownership."

"You honor me, Esias."

"You accept them?"

"Aye, on your word, for I need them. Conops, fetch them up on deck and see if they need clothing. Turn them over to the store-keeper to be clothed, and then to the armorer—"

"Lord Tros," Esias interrupted, "it is, as you know, against the law to arm slaves in Alexandria. Nevertheless, I have already armed these. They are splendid archers. They have bows, swords, bucklers and the body-armor of Thracian hoplites taken from the battle-field of Pharsalia and sold at the auction in Rome after Caesar's triumph. But the helmets are of the new style, of your own design, made in my workshops. They are also already clothed in Your Honor's livery. And each one brings with him a basket of two hundred arrows, plumed with goose-quill and tipped with bronze. My countrymen can fight, and these are young men of good breeding. Perhaps they will no longer be slaves when they return to Alexandria."

"They shall have their chance," said Tros. "I love a man who loves freedom well enough to earn it."

TROS and Esias embraced each other, whispering, first in one ear, then the other, the ritual phrases of a secret brotherhood as ancient as the monuments of Thebes, far older than Eleusis. Then Esias took Tros' arm to the deck and ten sturdy young Jews in Thracian body-armor but with strange, uncrested helmets, went down on their knees to kiss Esias' hand.

"Your new master," said Esias, and Tros bade them stand up. They looked him straight in the eyes, measuring him as he measured them. He examined them each, in turn, from head to foot. They appeared to like it. They were in no wise ashamed of themselves. They had cleaned their armor until it shone. They had the impudent health in their eyes of men who have nothing to lose but manhood.

"A good gift, Esias. They shall not lack their chance to show merit."

Then, as a deck decurion helped Esias down the ladder into his sixteen-oared, awninged boat, there began the orderly, heart-thrilling marvel of a great ship getting under weigh.

There was no wind. For the sheer love of splendor Tros ordered the purple sails unbrailed and sheeted down. A cymbal clanged the "stand by, all!" To the sharp shouts of the oar-bank captains, three banks on either side shot forth oar-blades, all together, to half length, with a thump of the ash looms on the oak ports.

The forward capstan clanked to a deep-sea chantey—the immortal, hilarious one about Zeus and the sea-god's daughter. There was a cry from Conops in the bow. And then, from Tros on the poop beside the long-limbed Argive helmsman:

"Out oars! Ready! Dip!"

He set the time for the drums with his right hand. They thundered. The vermilion oar-blades flashed in the noon-day sun and the ship leaped. The blue sea boiled alongside. The gold-leaf covered tongue of the wide-mouthed serpent at the ship's bow darted and flashed on its hidden gimbals as if the serpent were alive.

"An omen, Lord Tros, a great good omen!" said the helmsman, pointing to the glistening summit of the Pharos lighthouse. Sea-birds soared around it, evenly spaced, in an almost perfect circle.

Tros waved to Esias. Then he answered the helmsman:

"Four hundred and three score men—the best ship on all earth's oceans—a dangerous voyage beginning — bad weather a-brew in that haze to the south —that's desert dust. Eyes on the course,

you Argive dreamer! She'll be blowing a three-reef gale by midnight."

Then, to his chief-lieutenant, a Phoenician, fifty years old:

"You may change the sails, Ahiram. Get these stowed and bend on the new flax set. Order the lower-deck captains to check the oar-port covers and have them ready."

The Phoenician glanced southward, met Tros' eyes and nodded. There was a storm on the way from the Libyan desert.

CHAPTER III

"BETRAY ME TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER!"

LARS TARQUINIUS was seasick, but too mean-spirited and obstinate to vomit. He asked Tros' leave to remove his corselet, a very handsome specimen of armor that made him look a great deal more Romanly heroic than he felt. He eyed the spare bunk yearningly; it looked warm and luxurious; but Tros, perhaps purposely, had almost covered it with odds and ends of furniture that were roped to keep them from being pitched to the floor.

In the light from the swaying overhead lantern Tros didn't look like a man who would be sentimentally considerate of a prisoner's feelings. It already amounted to that. They were alone in Tros' cabin, and Tros appeared to have no weapon on his person. But Tarquinius was a prisoner. He knew it, although he still wore his double-edged Egyptian dagger in a Roman sheath.

There was no longer a rhythmic oar-pulse. The weary, well-fed rowers were asleep in the dark on shelves, like corpses in a catacomb. The ship reeled and creaked as the Libyan *Khamasin*, sand-laden, bullied a following sea into steep waves. It was as much as Tarquinius could manage to keep himself off the floor. He had to grip the chair-arms. It was humilating to him that Tros should be able to keep his feet and even to pace the floor, to and fro, with his arms behind him.

"Take it off, yes," Tros answered. "Why did you put it on? Why the dagger?" His own double-edged sword, in the second-best sheath, lay on the starboard bunk, fore and aft, with the hilt on the pillow. His helmet and corselet swayed from the hooks on the bulkhead.

"Those are fierce men in the deck-house, where your insolent man, Conops, told me I may sleep," Tarquinius answered. He let his corselet fall to the floor with a thump. For a moment he sprawled with his elbows on the table and his eyes shut. Then he sat back and huddled himself in his scarlet equestrian toga. "I don't care to be murdered," he remarked.

"Do you know an honest sailor when you see one?" Tros retorted. "Those are my petty officers. They would no more think of harming you than I would—"

Tarquinius looked relieved; even his aquiline blue-red nose looked a bit less cynical, until Tros added:

"—without cause!"

Tarquinius found a flare of temper somewhere beneath his miserable surface.

"You invited me into your cabin," he grumbled. "By Bacchus, you haven't offered me a drink, nor anything but insult. I am sick."

"So I see. You will be more sick before we make the lee of Cyprus. Talk while you can."

"About what? *Bona dea!* Can I see into your thoughts? I am here on the authority of the queen's secretary."

Tros stood still in front of him, holding a chair-back, leaning across the table with the lamplight aglow on his eyes. "Why did you write to the merchant Esias, in a letter which you threw, along with a piece of silver, to the bow-oarsman of Esias' boat, saying he should

thank you if his corn should reach its destination?"

"You have a powerful imagination, Captain Tros. The answer is simple. I didn't."

"The proof," said Tros, "also is simple. Here is the letter. Look at it. You see it? The last paragraph reads: 'remember me, Jew Esias. One of these days I shall ask for my honorarium.' What does that mean?"

Tarquinius felt too sick to invent any lies. He was like a witness under torture. The truth seemed relatively unimportant, except as the easiest means of hurting the inquisitor's feelings. He wanted to go away and lie down.

"I intended Esias to know that the secret is out," he answered. He sneered like a wolf. "His and yours also! Have you heard that the Cyprus fleet has declared for Arsinoe? That was Esias' doing! You are the Jew's catspaw. One of my informers is a slave in Esias' office, who overheard Esias telling his partners that he would offer you a fifth to see that the corn reaches its destination. The corn is meant for Cassius, who is to invade Egypt and to instal Arsinoe on the throne. Cleopatra—"

He made a gesture with his hand across his Adam's apple. Then, at last, suddenly he met Tros' eyes at full stare. His own, that were flinty and watery-gray with red rims, hardened in the lamplight, excited, as if he were staking his all on one throw of the dice.

"Tros, I also know on which side of the platter the food is. I, too, am on the side of Arsinoe. There will be some pickings for smart fellows when that young woman gets her rights."

"HER rights?" Tros leaned against the after bulkhead. "Do you mean her revenge?"

"Rights was the word I used."

"Explain it." Tros awaited a roll of the ship and then eased himself into the chair at the end of the table. He struck a gong. It was the only release of emotion that he permitted himself, and even that was chargeable to the noise of the storm. He struck so suddenly and so loud that Tarquinius turned as if to ward off a blow. But Tros had to strike three times before the steward heard through the storm and came in from his cubby-hole under the breach of the poop.

"Wine!"

The steward returned very quickly with a skin of Egyptian wine, which he hung from a hook on the overhead beam. He poured two silver bowls about a third full, gave one to each of them and retired. There was no need to spill a libation; the ship's motion attended to that. Tros drank. Tarquinius drank and began to feel less wretched as the strong stuff stirred his blood.

"Explain," Tros repeated. "You said Arsinoe's rights."

"I said it. Do you realize that when Caesar came the Alexandrines had deposed Cleopatra and driven her out of Egypt? They didn't choose to have an eighteen-year-old girl reforming their government and cutting off the wrong heads. They wanted some one they could manage. So they made her younger brother and sister joint rulers, under a regency that knew its business.

"Then Caesar came, and Cleopatra showed she has genius, even though she is a she-Ptolemy. Instead of invading Egypt with a Syrian army, she had herself smuggled back to Alexandria. Some say she came on your ship. Did she? Anyway, she was taken in to Caesar's presence in a roll of rugs, and she became his mistress. But Arsinoe was still the lawful Queen of Egypt.

"The young king was killed in battle later on and Queen Arsinoe became Caesar's prisoner. But she was never deposed by the Alexandrines. She was still the lawful Queen of Egypt. If not, why did Caesar walk her through Rome

at his chariot-tail in his three-day triumph? Why he didn't have her beheaded afterward, as is usual, I don't know. He had Vercingetorix, the Gaul beheaded after that triumph, you remember. It was an actual fact, and still is, that Arsinoe was the court's choice, the priests' choice, the people's choice, the Jews' enthusiastic choice.

"She is the lawful and the only Queen of Egypt. She was recognized as such by the Roman senate by being so described on the placards before and behind her when she was marched through the streets in humiliation. She has not been legally deposed by any one who had authority to do it. She was crowned queen, with the double crown of Egypt, by the high priest, on the steps of the temple of Serapis, in full view of the public. Queen of Egypt she still is.

"And the gold of Egypt, Captain Tros, let me tell you, will fall plop-plop-plop into the laps of the men who have the good sense to perceive the girl's manifest destiny and to help to bring it to pass."

"You think Egypt would accept Arsinoe?"

"Aye. Egypt will accept what Alexandria chooses. Rome will swiftly recognize her, because she is one of those priest-ridden fools who are easy to manage. No matter who helps her back to the throne, Arsinoe will pick Octavian to win, because she has never seen him, so she can't hate him as much as she hates Antony. That will mean a river of Egyptian money pouring into Octavian's pocket.

"Plunder! Plunder! Can't you see it? She may try to marry Octavian. Give me more wine. It seems to ease my belly. Captain Tros, I pledge you youth and beauty, the cult of Venus-Aphrodite, mystic merry-making, woman in her right place as man's convenience. To Queen Arsinoe of Egypt—may the gods give her a Roman husband!"

TROS got up and refilled Tarquinius' bowl from the swinging wine-skin.

"How much of this," he asked when he sat down again, "do you think Queen Cleopatra suspects? You should know. They say you are in the Lady Charmion's confidence, and she is supposed to know the queen's thoughts."

Tarquinius smiled. It was meant to be the kind of smile that fluxes understanding between man and man. But the ship was plunging, tossing her stern to a blast from the Libyan desert. It was a sour smile. He had to wait a few moments before he could speak.

"As you know, Captain Tros, no one is in that woman's confidence, nor in the queen's. Such a poor devil as I am—I had a tidy fortune, but I lost it—has to swallow condescensions, though they make the blood boil. *Hecate!* I knew the Lady Charmion when she hadn't a shift to her name, when she climbed in through a palace window to beg clean clothing from one of Arsinoe's slaves. One would think now, however, to hear her speak to me, that she had bought me at auction, cheap."

Tros nodded. He could almost sympathize with any one who had suffered Charmion's temper. It was just as well, though, that his elbow was on the table and his right hand, supporting his chin, concealed his mouth. His smile might have silenced Tarquinius, who, unaware of the smile, continued to reveal himself, in a desperate, gambler's effort to win Tros over.

He had no hope of winning Tros' friendship. Even with the strong wine in his brain he was too shrewd to pretend to try to do that. Very shrewdly, indeed, he even took for granted Tros' contempt, and showed his own contempt for Tros' scruples.

"Such a man as I am, Captain Tros, has to use all available means to an end. And the end is, to take good care of me,

Tarquinius. It is my business to learn what is going on."

"Why not call yourself a spy and have done with it?"

"If it pleases you—very well, call me a spy, if that makes you feel virtuous. But I spy in my own interest. Do you understand that? There is only one person whose interests I serve. He is Lars Tarquinius, Etruscan, *eques Romanus*, to myself the most important person in the world. The world may rot, for all of me, unless it treats me handsomely.

"When I accepted a beggarly pittance from the Lady Charmion, it was in order to serve my ends, not hers. I know all about her having wanted you for a lover, and how she hates you for refusing. I didn't know whether that meant you are a Samothracian ascetic, or whether you aim higher. Some of the court gossips insist you are Cleopatra's lover." He paused, staring straight into Tros' eyes. But he learned nothing.

"Anyhow, I offered to spy on you, because I knew of no better way to reach Arsinoe. When your servant opened and examined my baggage"—he paused again, guessing at the probable depth of Tros' credulity, but Tros betrayed no emotion, so he continued. It was a bow at a venture—a shrewd guess, but his eyes betrayed that was guessing—"he removed a valuable letter. Where is it?"

"Why not say he stole your money also?" Tros asked.

It was too late for Tarquinius to take a different line. He had chosen his gambit. He had to carry on.

"Did you know," he asked, "or have you perhaps guessed that the crews of the Cyprus fleet have corrupted your crew? I have been a sick man, ever since we left port, but I am not blind. I am a professional observer. I saw the whispering going on among your station captains and decurions. I will make you a wager of all the money I have, that they all now know the contents of that letter that your servant removed from my baggage.'

"Are you sure you had the letter with you?" Tros asked.

"Yes." He spoke slowly. "A letter from a friend of mine in Rome, asking whether you can't be won over to Arsinoe's side. My friend says that Ahenobarbus is at sea with a fleet, and that certain senators in Rome having denounced you as an enemy of the Roman People, Ahenobarbus intends to treat you as a pirate.

"My friend's name is Publius Cinna; he is one of the secretaries to the senate, so he learns pretty nearly everything that is going on. He asked me to advise you to abandon Egypt and to attach yourself at once to Queen Arsinoe, because Ahenobarbus has orders from Octavian to recognize Arsinoe's claims. If you were under her protection, he would have to let you alone." He paused again. Then: "You realize, of course, that Cleopatra would disown you in a moment rather than risk giving offense before she knows whose is the winning hand."

"How did you get that letter?" Tros asked.

"None of your business. Buy me, if you want my channels of communication. The point is, your crew know the contents of that letter, and they know what it means to be treated as pirates by such a Roman as Ahenobarbus.

"Have you ever heard, Captain Tros, of a commander being forced by his men to change sides? Doesn't a wise commander change sides before they force him? Learning what they wish, doesn't he command that, so that they may think him a wise leader? Your man Conops, who you think is such a loyal dog, employs his loyalty this minute in persuading your crew that the way to save you and them from crucifixion is to force you to declare for Arsinoe."

TROS smothered a smile. Roman torturers, in Gaul, had burned out Conops' eye for refusing to tell Tros' secrets. However, there was no need to say anything about that. He struck the gong. The steward entered.

"Conops."

The steward vanished. Tarquinius tried to employ the ensuing minute shrewdly.

"Doubtless," he said, "he has thrown the letter overboard. He isn't likely to admit having stolen it."

Conops entered, with his knitted red cap pulled down over his blind eye. He was dripping-wet, barefooted, chewing a clove of garlic.

"My cloak. No, not that one, you unthrifty wastrel! Do I wear my best one on a wet night? The shabby one. The old brown one. So. Now the sword. Stay here. Sit down and do your best to entertain this Roman *eques*."

Eyeing the Etruscan, and particularly his dagger, with obedient, watchdog curiosity, Conops took the third chair. By the way of suitable entertainment he began doing tricks with his knife. Tros grinned and went on deck.

Immediately outside the door, to port and starboard of a short passage, were two low-roofed cabins. The one on the port hand contained the steward's quarters, pantry and bunks for Conops and several other dependable men. Tros, waiting for a moment of balance between waves, opened the door and peered in. There was no light—no other sound than snoring, but the steward came to life from somewhere and loomed like a ghost in the dark.

"Go in and fill the Etruscan's cup. Give Conops about a third of a cupful. Then fetch out the wine-skin, get a lantern, and wait for me at the door of the starboard bunk-house."

Tros climbed to the poop. It was almost too dark to see the steersmen, two of them at the one long oar, their eyes straining to catch the least gesture of the Phoenician, who leaned with his back against the taffrail and sensed the course by only he knew what means, but it was partly by the wind on the back of his neck, and partly by the feel of the roll and plunge, and partly by the angle of the waves that thundered astern.

There were no stars visible. There was no sign of the Pharos lighthouse, visible from forty miles at sea on clear nights. The Phoenician had fetched the deck watch of twenty men to the poop, to have them handy where they could hear his orders; they were herded together close to the bulwark and their humming was faintly audible below the howl of the wind. The Phoenician asked leave to come about and heave to. Tros studied the sea and the wind and the ship's motion for about three minutes before he answered:

"Carry on, Ahiram. This should blow itself out before tomorrow's sunset. If the wind eases, we'll shake down a reef. There'll be no chance to use oars. Even under the lee of Cyprus there'll be a heavy sea for a couple of days."

The Phoenician's teeth showed for a second, in a flash of a grin that might have meant anything. Tros leaned beside him for a while, listening to the weight of the wind in the reefed sails, reconsidering his judgment, estimating speed, and then, little by little, letting other thoughts enter his mind. Here was a weird sensation, nowhere to be felt but on a ship at sea, of hundreds of lives confined, in silence, within a living thing that was all sound and motion. Four hundred and three score men, as ignorant of their destiny as the ship herself, all under one man's hand, all drilled and armed for not even Tros himself could guess what violent event.

He was determined, if wind and sea would let him, to reach Salamis ahead of the ten Egyptian ships, with whose admiral he was supposed to cooperate. He hardly doubted that admiral's trea-

son. It was almost a certainty. Fleets, since Caesar's death, had become pawns in a game of Who-owns-the-money? That Egypt had enormous stores of food and money was no special reason for loyalty to Cleopatra. Rather the contrary. The plunder would be shared among those who could foresee who would steal her throne.

Some Roman—it could be no one but a Roman. Rome could no longer exist without Egypt's corn and money. But which Roman? Which of the warring generals would sense out his chance to seize Arsinoe, in Cyprus, under pretext of restoring Cyprus to Roman rule; and to do then what Caesar did after Pharsalia—set sail for Alexandria and seize the place.

It would be a simple matter to depose or to kill Cleopatra; should a Roman fleet appear, she would very likely be murdered by the Roman legions in Alexandria. To establish Arsinoe on the throne, with Roman legions in support, would amount to annexation of Egypt. And whoever could accomplish that would have Rome at his feet. He would have all the wealth of Egypt with which to debauch and bribe and buy Rome.

His muttered thoughts went down wind, but Ahiram saw his lips move. He thrust his head closer, and dared to repeat his advice to put the ship about and heave to.

"Carry on," Tros answered. "It will blow itself out, like a woman's anger."

The Phoenician shook his head and Tros laughed, no longer thinking of the storms that he understood, but of the minds of three women that he did not understand.

The Greek second officer came to the poop. The watch changed, but the Phoenician refused to go below. He and the Greek stood watch together, straining their eyes toward the faint grayish loom of the sails in the dark.

TROS left them and found the steward waiting for him with the wine-skin and a lantern. He entered the starboard bunk-house, where a dozen of his faithful Northmen usually lived, between him and a possibly mutinous crew. He took the lantern from the steward and swung it. The ten young Jews were sleeping two in a bunk, to share five blankets. They had wrapped their armor in the other five, and they had their bows in bed with them, to keep the gut-strings dry and the wood from absorbing moisture. As they awoke with the light in their eyes they fell out of the bunks and stood to attention, naked.

"Fetch the store-keeper!"

The steward set down the wine-skin and went on the run. Not another word was spoken until the store-keeper came, breathless, lugged out of a warm bunk with no time to clothe himself, his naked skin glittering wet in the lantern light. He was scared; he had never been summoned at night except for neglect of duty.

Tros let him take a good look at the bunk-house interior. Then he smashed him in the face with the full strength of his right fist. The man staggered against the bulkhead and pitched forward with the ship's roll. Tros' fist met him with a crack like the sound of a slaughterer's pole-axe and the man collapsed into a lower bunk.

"Come out of that! Stand at attention!" Then, after another swing of the lantern: "Am I a pauper, that ten men share five blankets? Where are the bow-covers? Where the the woolen bags for their armor?"

"They are slaves, Lord Tros. Should I serve them the same as the others?"

"By the living lords of Earth and Sea, are my ears failing? Did I hear you? Dog of a Tyrian ingrate, that would let the rats eat blankets rather than see slaves warm! Silence! Slaves, are they? They have saved my property by taking

thought, so they have saved you from being punished. You escape with a reprimand." Tros smashed him again in the face with his right fist. "Now go and fetch ten bow-covers and ten bags for their armor. Bring them yourself, you mean-souled miser, and care they are dry when they get here. Fall away."

The Jews were shivering. Tros bade them cover themselves and hold out their mugs for the steward to pour wine. First he made them drink enough to keep the rest of the wine from spilling; then he made them stand, with their backs steadied against the bunks, holding the cups to their breasts.

"Your officer," he said, "will be my man Conops. You will obey him instantly to the death, at all times and whatever he commands. He is neither a beauty, nor a philosopher, nor a man of breeding. He can neither read nor write. But he is loyal. Be you loyal also.

"Your principal duty will be to guard me, day and night. Your battle station will be beside and behind me, wherever I am. No man who is obedient and brave shall ever look to me in vain, either for his rights or any good that I can do him. Wrap your weapons carefully when the store-keeper brings the covers. Treat him respectfully. Remember: when I reprimand a man, that ends it. I despise—I get rid of a man who lets his malice linger in the bruise that justice made. You may turn in."

HE took one more turn on the poop, where he received the reports from the officers on watch that all was well below. Then he returned to his cabin, where the steward re-hung the wine-skin to the beam. Tarquinius was sprawling forward on the table, and his dagger was on the floor under Conops' foot. There was a question in Tros' eyes. Conops answered it as soon as the steward had gone:

"He offered me fifty *denarii* to tell him the way to your good will, master."

Tarquinius stirred and groaned.

"I would have offered more," he said, looking up with his head in his hands, "if I had had it. Tell him to return my dagger. When I lurched he took it from me. He is as suspicious as a scorpion."

Conops looked at Tros and half-closed his one eye. Tros nodded.

"I have given you the ten Jews, Conops. Lick them into shape. And if I catch them lacking discipline, or hating you, or mistrusting you, or unwilling to jump at a wink, I will give them another officer and send you to the lower oak banks. Learn them first. Then teach them. Fall away."

"Yes, master. Shall I give the *eques* his dagger?"

Tros took it. He struck its point into the table. Conops was out of the cabin before the dagger had ceased to vibrate. Then Tros sat down.

"Tarquinius," he said, and he watched the man as if he could read through his skin to the nature beneath, "my good will is as easy to get as a death on a dark night."

The Etruscan sat upright with an effort. He laid his right fist on the table and clenched it so hard that the knuckles grew white.

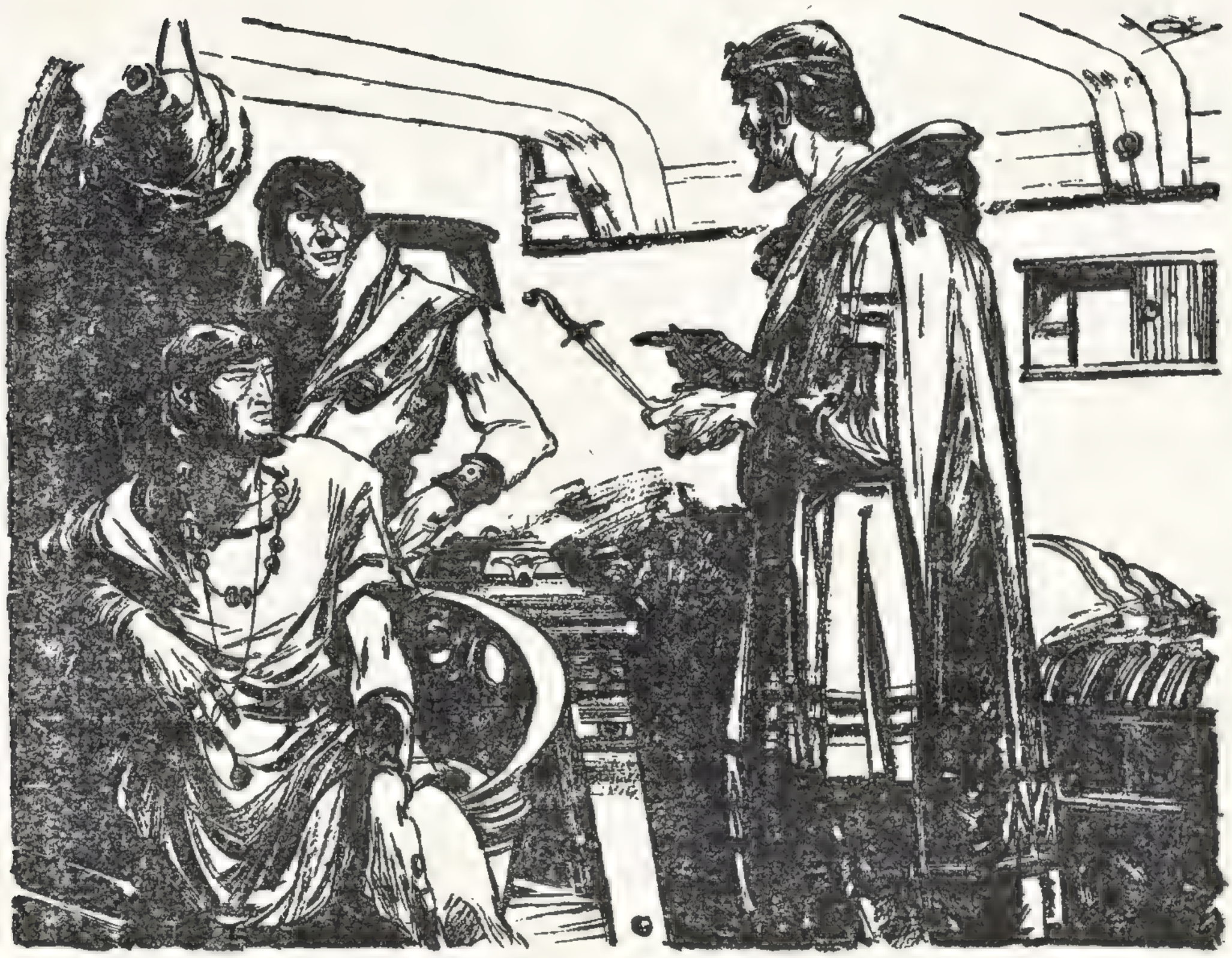
"Captain Tros, I have intelligence for sale."

"If a louse should valuably serve me, Tarquinius, I would let him live, to be a louse, until he should be cracked by some one who loves justice less than I do."

"Make me a bid. I need a patron."

Tros' humor welled to the surface in a grand, unconquerable grin that made the Etruscan's eyes turn shifty and set his fingers drumming on the table.

"Let that dagger alone, Tarquinius. Let us see now: you are the client of the Lady Charmion, and her you propose to betray. You are the spy of the queen's secretary, and him you propose to betray. You are my guest, and me you have tried to betray; you have tried to



make my crew mutinous, and to make me believe they are so. You are in correspondence with Ahenobarbus, aren't you?"

"How do you know it?"

"In the same way that I know you lied about a letter from Publius Cinna, which you said my man Conops stole. You tried to dagger Conops, to prevent him from telling the truth to me; that was why he took your dagger." Tros flicked the dagger and made it thrum again. Then he pulled its point out of the oak and handed it back to Tarquinius with an unspoken and almost unexpressed contempt that stung worse than a blow.

"But that is not all," he continued, observing the ferocious hatred that had steeled the Etruscan's eyes. "You have lied to me about my friend Esias, to whom I don't doubt you would lie about me, if you should see occasion. You intend to lie about us all to the Princess Arsinoe, whom you will betray to whoever shall make it worth your while."

The Etruscan snarled. "You make out a fine case! You remind me of that old four-faced humbug, Cicero, accusing Cataline and Verres. Name me a man or a woman of any importance in the world who isn't ready to betray you, or me, or any one at the toss of a coin! Does the Queen of Egypt trust *you*? Hah! Where are your Northmen? It is because *they* trust you, and she thinks you are fool enough to keep faith with drunken savages, that she has dared to risk turning you loose to chance your own neck and fortune for her advantage. Win or lose, she would betray you in a minute."

"But you?"

"*Bona dea!* Didn't I tell you the

truth? I told you I serve only me, Lars Tarquinius!"

"The truth saved you from drowning," Tros answered. "That is once when you served yourself well. For that truth, I will be your patron."

"How much will you pay me?"

"Your life. Your liberty. I will set you ashore, to continue to serve Lars Tarquinius. You may sell me to the highest bidder. Make what profit you can."

"You mean—if I should strike a bargain with Arsinoe—you would keep to its terms?"

"I strike my own bargains. I name my own terms," Tros answered. "You live. That is all of the terms of my bargain with you. You go ashore and serve Tarquinius. Betray me to the highest bidder."

Tros struck the gong. The steward came.

"Pick up Lars Tarquinius' corselet and carry it forward for him. Help him along the deck to his quarters."

Tros returned to the poop, noticing as he passed that Conops had transferred himself to the starboard bunk-house with the ten new Jews.

CHAPTER IV

"I SWEAR BY LARS TARQUINIUS!"

THE seaman's consciousness produced its miracle. Tros made his landfall. A man at the reeling mainmast-head, with the eyes of a gull and the lungs of Aeolus, hailed the poop about two hours after Tros had made it high noon from a study of his three temperamental water-clocks.

Conops, who took nothing on land or sea for granted except that Tros must be served, went aloft and confirmed the report. He could see the strange masses of foam on the southeastern shore of Cyprus—the foam from which, as all men knew, the goddess Aphrodite had been born. He could see the vague loom of the mountains beyond. But there was no sign of any Egyptian fleet—not a sail on all those tumbling seas.

Tros made his lee long before nightfall. He hove to, three or four cables' lengths from shore, in comparative calm, to give the cooks a chance to feed the crew. He was no believer in the Spartan diet that the Romans considered good for deep-sea discipline. Full bellies breed few mutinies. The British druids had taught him the secret of clean water-casks, purified with charcoal. He had found out for himself the value of dried Arabian apricots and dates, to offset the eternal Egyptian eggs and sun-dried meat. He had ample store, too, of onions, carrots, honey, olive oil, wheat and barley. His cooks were Syrians, and his ovens were things of his own invention, fired with charcoal.

He knew, too, the value of song, to keep crowded men from thinking about hardship. He carried four bards, bawdy and well paid rogues with harps, whose business was to improvise new words to ancient songs. They were even allowed to be personal about himself, and to put the men's grievances into song, provided they did it humorously.

He had learned that good trick from the Northmen, the world's bitterest grumblers, whose skalds had an almost unlimited license to voice the moods of the men who must die at the word of command. Men die more gallantly who know that their leader knows their heartaches.

He had solved a hundred problems that the Romans, with all their genius for war, had left unsolved. Romans had not understood the essential fact that command of the sea depends on mobile men, not ponderous, floating forts. They were still thinking in terms of the wars with Carthage, making a land-war of a sea-war, grappling ship to ship and relying on size, weight, numbers to offset speed and the ability to turn.

It was not Romans—not at the moment—that worried Tros; he had the heels of any Roman ship afloat. It was the Queen of Egypt that he feared as he paced his heaving poop. He, who loved his independence more than life itself and who had a mystical, obstinate conviction that a man and a woman are as light and darkness, strength and weakness, the woman forever the betrayer, was in the toils of a woman who hated Rome as much as he did, and who would use all resources, her own body included, in a war to a finish. A woman so intellectually subtle and steel-witted that she had even persuaded Caesar to despise Rome. A woman to whom religion, and even life, was a means to an end. A wholly admirable, baffling, utterly courageous woman, as rich as Croesus, as ready of laughter as a child, as alone as the Sphinx, as full of mystery as an Egyptian night.

Tros' crowning indiscretion had been to take Cleopatra into his confidence. He had been fooled by her love of ancient Egypt and her understanding of the occult teachings of the Mystery of Philae. He had thought her a brilliant mystic in a world of ruthless greed—certainly the hope of Egypt, perhaps the hope of the world. He had discovered that ruthlessness and subtlety were as inseparable in Cleopatra's consciousness as the two sides of a ray of moonlight.

From the moment when he had told her of his projected voyage around the world he had been in her net, although it had taken him time to discover the fact. She understood his loyalties and his prodigious sense of gratitude—his will to repay favors and to reward the giver.

So she had cat and moused him, picking his brains while he employed them in her interest. It was her agents in Punt and Arabia who had gathered for him information about almost legendary lands to eastward. She had put at his command the almost fathomless resources of the Library of Alexandria and the spider-web channels of information possessed by the priesthood of Isis, Serapis, Ammon and Aphrodite.

With amusement, and another emotion that she did not confess to herself, though it lurked in her eyes in her moodier moments and Tros detected it, she had shared his prodigious passion for geography. He had an outline map of Africa, compiled from conjecture and hearsay. He had a chart of the Red Sea coastline from Berenice to Punt, and a hearsay and guesswork chart of the ocean and islands between Punt and India, part of it inked in by the queen's own hand, as the result of the examination of three Greek traders from Sokotra.

Those Greek monopolists had made a mystery about Sokotra, but they had been kept thirsty until willing to talk. Then one of them, with the sound of dripping water in his ears, had told too much—had boasted of a voyage he had made from Sokotra eastward, to the land where slant-eyed men made silk from the magical vomit of captive worms, and a river as great as the Nile and as yellow as saffron poured into a sea whose fire made midnight luminous.

So that Greek toiled in the middle oar-bank, against the day when Tros might need him as interpreter and guide. Down on the lower oar-bank, was another pilot, possibly useful, from an island far to westward of Africa, who spoke no language comprehensible to any one but Tros himself and Conops, who had picked up scraps of Basque and could make occasional guesses at what the man meant.

But those were only parts of Cleopatra's ways—her baits, like her promise of fifty ships to accompany Tros around the world. Year after year Tros had laughed at himself as a male Penelope, forced for the sake of an ideal to unweave his own work. And now, as he gazed at the cloud-hung coast of Cyprus he knew he was no nearer to his goal, not

though he should outwit Romans and Egyptians.

He did not even know there were not traitors in the crew, although that was the least of his problems; if Tarquinius, or any one else, had contrived to corrupt a few of the men, he would know how to deal with that. He had the ever reliable Conops and he watched him now, with quiet amusement, training the ten new Jews to their appointed job.

THEY lacked the heft and whirlwind blast of charging battle-axe men, but they made up for that with deftness, speed and a ferocious will to earn their freedom. Conops lined them on the poop, and again and again made them leap to the deck to repel imagined boarders, their swords held ready for a lunge when the smashing shields should have hurled an adversary backward on his heels, all point, no time-wasting with the edge of the blade. Then, almost before their feet had touched the deck:

"Back to him! Back to your lord, you sons of Solomon! By Dionysius' back teeth, are you the east wind or your owner's bodyguard? You leave him exposed to arrow-fire? Up-shields to left and right of him, and leave him sword-room! You there, Jacob, what's a shield for? To hide your modesty, or to fight with and protect your owner? Gladiator, you? You'd last a minute! Let me see that shield dance! Aphrodite Kallipygos! Are you holding up a mirror for the Triumvir to prick his pimples?

"Now then: when they come at the poop, you're not the answer, there's no time to answer. You're death on the wing, in the air before they know you've started. You don't need half-an-hour to kill your man and get back. You're too slow forming wedge. Don't fall back on the wings. The leader leaps forward and the rest of you after him, four to port and five to starboard.

"Jeremiah, let's try you in the centre this time. Now remember: you kick off the edge of the poop with your right foot, shields at half-arm and hilts well back. Smash, thrust, and then back with you. Odd numbers retire first, two paces, then even numbers two paces, odd numbers two paces—and you're on the poop before a priest could say money! Now then—clear the poop!—Form wedge!—Have at 'em! That's better! But for the love of your father Abraham, no wonder Pompey took Jerusalem! Why don't you wait and kiss the enemy? Why not be polite and let him reach the poop ahead of you? Haven't you ever seen a wave hit a beach and go curtseying back? Well then, try it again."

The hatches were on over the upper oak-banks, to make deck room, and the whole ship's company was at drill of one kind of another. Tarquinius, not so seasick now, sat on the deckhouse roof pretending to watch the drill. But Tros had observed what might be signals ashore. He watched Tarquinius, trying to imagine what treacheries were brewing in the man's brain. It would be altogether too risky to arrive in the Bay of Salamis before daybreak, since there were dangerous shoals at the harbor mouth, so it would be quite possible for Tarquinius' signals, if he should make any, to reach Salamis overland hours in advance of Tros' arrival. How much truth had Tarquinius told? What did he know? How much was he merely guessing?

A simple solution would have been to imprison the Etruscan in an empty water cask in the lower hold, and Tros loved simple solutions. But it would be too much like throwing away a key before discovering which lock it fitted. The one almost absolute certainty was that Tarquinius was planning treachery and had not told all the truth, since such men never tell that, even under torture. Parts of the truth, yes. Odds and ends that were true yesterday, or might be true tomorrow, yes. But the truth at the back

of his mind, his main information, and the hope or the plan he had based on it, never. There was no way to discover that but to leave him free and watch him.

There had been time, Tros reflected, since the corn fleet went to sea from Alexandria, for Tarquinius to send a message to Cyprus and to receive an answer. He might have sent such a message overland, by runner, by way of Syria. Through Charmion, or the queen's secretary, he might very easily have learned of the queen's intention to send Tros to follow the corn fleet; he might have known that several days before Tros knew it. He might have known it even before the corn fleet went to sea.

Such men usually have at least a dozen plans in mind. They dream dreams of what they would like to do, and of what they could do, given this or that turn of events; so not improbably Tarquinius had snatched at a thread that spider-webbed into a maze of previous intrigue. He was the kind of man who wrecks the designs of his betters, without ever having an honest design of his own; the kind who preceives a plot where none is, and who never believes the truth because he always thinks he sees some subtlety beneath it.

*

TROS sent for him. He came along the swaying deck between two seamen and collapsed limply, pea-green, on a coil of rope.

"I pity you," said Tros. "My mercy strains patience. Could you eat a stew of onions and beans and pig-meat?"

"Sulphury Cocytus! It makes me retch to smell it cooking."

"Very well. Shall I set you ashore?"

"Great Jupiter! You haven't that much kindness!" He looked incredulous, but a light had leaped into his eyes; they were flinty again, warmed by a colored hint of cunning. The avarice, that such men think is hope, had suddenly dismissed the lamentable complaints of his belly. His fingers gripped his knees. He sat upright. "For the feel of firm earth I would give more than you guess."

"Will you meet me in Salamis?"

"Immo."

"On your oath? By what do you swear?" Tros asked him.

"When I swear to the truth, I swear by Lars Tarquinius."

"Swear then, by your sorry looking seasick god, that you won't send word ahead of you by priest or pigeon—for I know there are homing pigeons in every temple hereabouts."

"Trust me! Should I find as much as a heap of stinking sacks in the nearest village, you may imagine me snoring on it all night long."

"And when you meet me in Salamis you will bring me all the news you can gather?"

"Aye and gladly, for I like you."

Tros did not wish to be too well liked by Lars Tarquinius. He craved his treachery, not his good will. Above all, he wanted him ashore before it was too dark for a pigeon to fly, and before it would be too late to find a fast horse. Se he interrupted Conops, and at a gesture the Jews went forward toward the cook-house, breathing through their noses.

In another moment the bustle and noise of drill and sword-stick practise was interrupted by Conops' whistle and shrill-lunged "boat away!" The boat crew, proud of seamanship as well as wary of rope-ends and Conops' knife-hilt, had the eight-oared boat overside before two men could haul out Tarquinius' baggage. The protesting Tarquinius was swung overside in a noose, dangled above the waves and dumped into the stern seat with a thump that made his body-armor clank like a load of javelins. He vomited at last.

But the idea of speed—that he must hurry because Tros was in a hurry—had been jarred into his consciousness better than words could do it. He might not have believed mere forms of speech.

Tros eyed the declining sun, wishing he knew more about the ways of pigeons. However, failing pigeons, he felt sure Tarquinius would find some means of making mischief before daylight.

"Ahiram," he said, after dark, when the ship was again under weigh, hugging the lee under oar and shortened sail, "since Caesar died the rulers of the world have all been guessing. Aye, and all their generals, and all their captains. None knows what may happen. But I know this:"

He paused. Ahiram waited, in a sort of deep-sea silence that was part of his nature.

"An honest man, at such a time, is as a cork on the sea. But a rogue is like a rat that burrows underground toward the weak point."

"Aye. But who can see him burrow?" said Ahiram.

"Where he burrows, he bites," Tros answered, and Ahiram turned that over slowly in his mind. Suddenly he asked:

"You think he bites us?"

"Are we weak?" Tros answered.

"Lord Tros, I can read this storm is passing. And another, soon coming, I smell. But your mind I can't read. Have you a plan?"

"I smell its makings. I have only an intention, not yet a plan," Tros answered.

"So? Then I smell trouble," said Ahiram. "As for me, I would have skinned that Etruscan. He has told some of the men that Queen Arsinoe pays double wages."

Tros nodded. He was beginning to see his way clear. All that night long there were beacons ashore, like rubies on the ledges of the hills.

CHAPTER V

"LORD CAPTAIN TROS!"

DAWN glimmered through a cloud bank on the splendid temple of Aphrodite, beyond the wooded plain, high on the hill above Salamis. It shone as white as a hound's tooth, an enormous mass of buildings within a high wall. For a while after that the astonishing foam along the shoreline merged into land and sea and sky, creating a polychrome haze in which the crew believed they saw Undines and sea-horses — monstrous, mysterious beings that obey the gods but make trouble for men. Out of that presently loomed the walls of Salamis, seventeen feet thick, and beneath those the masts of a hundred ships.

The River Bocarus, half hidden by myrtle and oleander, was a shadow shaped like a man's leg running, to the left of the city. Foam boiled over shoals at the harbor mouth. The serpent on the bow of Tros' trireme flashed its golden tongue straight at the city as the ship rose and fell on the waves at the bar that came tumbling from three directions.

Eastward, astern, toward the coast of Phoenicia, there were mountainous seas, although the wind had died, but within the wide harbor it was as calm as a millpond. There, their masts hardly moving against the city wall, the Egyptian corn fleet rode at anchor. Two small Roman biremes lay between them and the seaward channel.

"So we have them," said Ahiram.

"If we have brains, and a little luck, and some guts in our bellies," Tros answered. He was watching the broken rhythm of the waves and the swirling seabirds, studying the channel, which had shoaled badly of recent years. He decided he needed more sea-room. He had in mind the *corvi* on those biremes—long gang-planks with a spike at the end.

Let Romans drop those on a ship's deck and a sea fight would become a land fight such as suited Roman genius. So the cymbals clashed and the ship went forward under oars at quarter speed another cable's length toward the city where the harbor widened out and there was room to turn.

There was nothing that was not ready for instant action. The crew had been fed in the dark. The gray flax battle sails were brailed up to the three big yards, ready to be sheeted down in an instant; even if there were no wind they were a protection against arrow fire. There were men at the sheets and braces, casual looking, careful to appear seamanly unexcited, but every living man of them watching Tros with the side of his eye. All the palins were off; the master-archers were lovingly wiping imagined damp off the cords of the arrow engines. The arrow baskets were in place. The enormous weights that provided power for the catapults had been cranked to the top of the stanchions, down between which they would fall on the propelling levers, and thence on to wicker-work cushions below, at the touch of the decurion's trigger.

Those catapults were the deadliest war engines afloat. Their lead missiles were loaded with stuff that was worse than Greek fire, and their range was twice that of any Roman weapon, though they were difficult to aim on a tumbling sea and their layers gave themselves the airs of master artists.

There were a decurion and ten men to each catapult, to crank the weights, roll the leaden balls into place, pour in water and plug them, and to manhandle the revolving platforms.

Those were picked men, who gave themselves more airs than Tros himself, even though they feared the fireballs and believed Tros was in league with the powers of darkness. If he were not a black-magician, how should seawater, poured into evil-smelling stuff of which one ingredient was known to be yellowish crystals scraped from beneath old heaps of cattle dung, make the missiles take fire and explode with frightful heat and suffocating stench?

They were assistant magicians, of superior intelligence and entrails, whose special god was Pluto. Nevertheless, they appealed for special speed to Hermes when they aimed the catapults before loading, and then served them like lightning, lest the balls should burst inboard or in air before they struck their target. They were proud servants of a special mystery, armed, nevertheless, with shields and javelins for repelling boarders.

THERE was commotion on the decks of the Roman biremes. They began to clear in haste for action, throwing dunnage and small boats overboard. Their oars appeared and they rowed up close to their anchors, but they did not weigh yet, and the corn fleet seemed asleep. Tros let his trireme swing until her beam was toward the city, so that he could turn whichever way he pleased and keep the Romans guessing.

A man at Tros' mainmast-top hailed the poop, gesturing. From northward, around the corner, with a man standing in the bow to con the course, and pitching like a porpoise at play, came Tros' long-boat rowed by eight Gauls, with Conops in the stern making signals, unintelligible except that they were urgent. Tros, after one glance seaward continued to watch the harbor front.

"You expect Tarquinius?" asked Ahiram, between Tros and the helmsman.

"No," he answered, fairly confident that he had outguessed that specialist in treachery. "I expect proof of his night's work. With his feet on dry land, malice should have strengthened his stomach. If there is a horse in Cyprus, he found it and reached Salamis. But he won't

show himself to us. He likes to think he makes and unmakes kingdoms from behind the throne."

"I would have drowned him," said Ahiram.

"That is why you are twice my age and not yet captain of a ship," Tros answered.

There was activity at a stone pier at the harbor front, difficult to make out because of the ships between and because the shadows of clouds were obscuring the view. Low visibility—a kind of hyphen-light between storm and storm. A small boat reached one of the Roman biremes, conveying a man in a glittering helmet. Presently he had himself rowed to the other bireme. Both biremes drew in their oars but continued to ride short to their anchors. Their decks were dark with armed men. The sun vanished. There came a squall of rain, then a sharp blast of wind from East-Northeast, ice-cold, from the Taurus Mountains. There would blow a Levanter before long.

The long-boat reached the trireme and two Gauls collapsed, rowed out, falling on their oars. Conops came up like a monkey; the boat, hard after him, walked up and swung inboard, crew and all, almost before Conops had reached the quarter-deck on the run. He saluted, more for time to get his breath than because he remembered manners.

"Master, there are three quinquiremes and two good-sized liburnians in a cove at the end of a bay to the north of us, just around the promontory. One quinquireme's aground by the beak with a list to starboard and a big sea pounding her. All the others are trying to haul her off. There's a third *liburnian* scouting seaward. That one hailed me, but I took a chance among the shoals, where he couldn't follow, and their arrows fell short."

"War crews?" Tros asked.

"Aye, master. Full crews. Crowded. One of the towing quinquiremes has lost her starboard dolphin overside. Some lubber let go the halyard. It almost crashed her own deck; they'd the yard braced fore and aft, to ease the roll. If they should stay there and fish for the thing it might be noon before they get here."

"Do they look like saving the quinquireme?"

"Pluto! They're rowing to whip, you can tell that by the jerk of the oars. If weight and strength can manage it, they'll haul her off. But you know Romans. They're towing criss-cross o' the way she beaked in."

"Did the *liburnian* keep you in sight?"

"No, master. She made sail to a squall o' wind and headed seaward, nearly due north. Being low in the water and pretty busy with the sea over the shoals, I couldn't see much. It's cloudy to the northward, and a high sea running, but I glimpsed a fleet of thirty, or maybe forty sail."

"Headed this way? Romans?"

"Pirates, I'd say. All lateen-rigged, masts too high and spars too short to be Egyptian ships. But I couldn't swear to it."

"Do you see that hill yonder? Take a fresh boat crew, have them set you ashore as close to the hill as you can get without being seen, climb to the top of the hill, and come back and report."

"Aye, aye, master."

The cymbals clanged and the oars dipped to keep the trireme slowly moving as a screen behind which Conops headed for the shoal-water, where he was soon out of sight. The trireme returned to mid-channel. The Egyptian doctor, who had been a court physician in Damascus, came out of the forward deckhouse to make sure his assistant had heated the tar; he seemed disappointed that there were no wounds to be cauterized yet. Tros sent a man for his helmet and armor; the ten Jews, sitting, out of the way, with their backs to the lee bulwark, smiled and drew their bow-

strings between caressing fingers. Tros drew on the purple cloak over his armor. The armor clanked. The crew grinned.

Then the hand of Lars Tarquinius appeared. From the wharf, between the anchored corn ships, came a gaily painted, high-prowed galley, rowed by forty oars. It carried an olive branch at the masthead. There was a high roofed cabin in the stern. The deck was white with the smocks of slaves and the robes of priests in high, conical hats.

It came at a great pace and lay alongside, as close as it could without touching oars. Two trumpeters on the roof of the cabin sounded a brilliant flourish; then a herald hailed—a fellow in a bright blue cloak, with a voice as brazen as his helmet.

"Come aboard, eh?" said Ahiram. "Do you?"

Tros laughed curtly. "Go you. Say I will receive the Queen Arsinoe. Have a care for our paint when they come alongside."

SO they lowered a boat and Ahiram borrowed Tros' second-best cloak, the canary-yellow one with crimson lining. Grizzled and hook-nosed seaman though he was, with eyes that lay deep amid weathered seams, like all Phoenicians he knew how to do the honors without compromising himself or his chief.

Tros shouted and the starboard oars came inboard with a thud and flourish, all together. Ahiram brought the forty-oared galley alongside, taking command with a natural authority that left the Cypriote captain speechless. Like Conops, there was only one man in the world whom Ahiram obeyed.

They lowered a narrow gang-plank from Tros' deck to the roof of the galley's cabin, and a high priest would have come up first, with two attendants, but he hesitated. The plank swayed. There was no rail, nothing but one hand-rope, and the angle was steep; he thought of dignity, and thought too long about it. Queen Arsinoe stepped past him and came up the plank in six boyish strides without touching the rope.

Tros, waiting for her on the main deck, bowed low and she gave him the backs of both her hands to kiss, while two eunuchs and two of her women squabbled with the priest and his attendants for right of way on the gang-plank. The ten Jews, in a line behind Tros, saluted with a clank of shields on armor. Ahiram helped the high priest up the plank. Tros led the way to the cabin and slammed the door in the face of the priests and all Arsinoe's attendants.

"A plain place," he remarked, "in which to receive a princess. It is the best I have. I am unused to women."

"Still?" She laughed and sat down in his chair at the table end, throwing open the royal purple cloak that she wore over an almost transparent white Greek *himation,* edged too with purple. She had a garland on her coppery-golden hair, and looked Bacchanalian, with a ribbon beneath her breasts, beautiful bare legs and gilded sandals. Taller than Cleopatra, better looking, with a straighter, more Grecian nose, she had all of her older sister's charm and lacked nothing of her regal self-assurance except for something in her eyes. They were beautiful eyes, blue, almost violet, but they seemed to be wondering, guessing, demanding. Cleopatra's eyes knew.

She didn't invite Tros to be seated. He stood studying her, not having seen her since she walked in golden chains at Caesar's triumph, mocked by the Roman women and leered at bawdily by garlic-reeking mobs from the slums of Tiber-side.

She had matured. Not yet eighteen, she looked Cleopatra's age—perhaps twenty—twenty-two. She had the same trick of seeming to be about to speak, with parted lips, but lingering to taste the flavor of a thought before tossing it forth in words exactly in the middle of a

note. She had almost Cleopatra's challenge, that could make catastrophes look like opening gambits in a royal game. Almost; not quite. There was something lacking, though it surely was not arrogance.

"Lord Tros, I need you."

He frowned. It was the right, and the wrong way, to challenge his interest.

"You need me." That was the wrong way.

The frown unfroze, leaving only the seams on a warrior forehead. He had read one riddle.

Her secret had crept forth and betrayed her as her smile changed subtly to that of a woman whose subtlety was merely guile, whose geese were swans, whose will was hope, whose daring was jealousy. It was the difference between ambition and greatness—the smile of a girl who had tasted failure, seeing lesser recklessness and greater guile succeed.

"Lord Tros, why are you deceived by the treacheries of that witch, my sister? Do you love dark forces? Is the dying magic of the night of ancient Egypt, that she wantons after, able to oppose the living gods? Do you mock destiny? Or like Ajax, do you defy the lightning? Does it mean nothing that I was exiled to this foam-born isle of Cyprus, where the goddess Aphrodite was created by the Lord of gods and men?"

Tros' amber eyes began to glow with a ferocity that made her hesitate. She had forgotten that he had just now slammed the door in the face of a high priest, who had been king of the greater part of Cyprus until crusty old Cato came from Rome and traded him a temple for his throne. Tros was too devoutly sceptical, too true a mystic, to fear anything but his own self-judgment. Destiny was something he created, by dealing with facts as they turned up.

"Let us speak of the corn fleet," he answered.

"Lord Tros, I have heard my sister loves you, but that Charmion, who is like a cat with a wildcat kitten, said nay to it."

Tros was silent.

"Cleopatra's love is like a quicksand that swallows and awaits the next victim. Not a doubt she loves you. Who else is there for her to love than you, who are descended from the gods—aye, a god upon earth, not a decayed old politician such as Caesar, with bad teeth and a bald head! Are you a son of Poseidon, the god of the sea?"

Cunning, but unclever. Rare was the man who doubted that the gods impregnate chosen mothers and beget great heroes; rarer yet, the man who would repudiate such parentage, if he could see advantage to himself. Caesar had claimed descent from Venus. Alexander the Great denied his father Philip, boasting that the Lord of gods Zeus-Ammon, in the form of a snake, had begotten him by his virgin mother, Olympias. Cleopatra herself claimed superhuman parentage. So did Arsinoe! she was inviting Tros to claim equality with all the great ones of the earth.

"I am who I am," Tros answered. Cleopatra would have known what that meant, but Arsinoe thought he boasted, and her eyes became luminous, flattering, unwisely confident. She had listened too much to the priests, and learned too little.

"My astrologer," she said, "forewarned me of your coming—"

"Is his name Lars Tarquinius?" Tros interrupted. "Princess, I have come for the corn fleet. I am told your viceroy, Serapion, has seized it for a bargain counter in his gamble for power."

"Serapion!" she answered. Her lip curled. Cleopatra's lips would have been less indiscreet, they would have smiled inscrutably; her voice would have been charged with unguessable meaning. But Arsinoe's voice was self-accusing: "I have used whom I could. It was that fox Herod who recommended Serapion. Lord Tros, I need *you!* I am Queen of

Egypt and whoever the Queen of Egypt weds is King of Egypt.

"Does the throne of Egypt not encourage you to change your dislike of women for a mood less unheroic? Are you not in Esias' confidence? I know you are! His money! The impatient fury of the hundred thousand Jews of Alexandria! One word from you! Now is the time, Lord Tros—the day of destiny! Seize Egypt! The oracles all declare this hour awaits a man of destiny."

"Let the hour learn patience!" Tros retorted. "I am not he."

ARSINOE'S face became less charming. The Ptolemy duplicity smouldered within the sudden anger of her eyes.

"You realize," she asked him, "what I offer you?"

"Aye," he said, "but none else heard it. I am not so constituted that I crave a wider kingdom than my own ship. Least of all have I the genius to be a queen's he-concubine."

She laughed and looked lovely again.

"Women have been known to love a man," she answered. "I cannot love a weakling. I could glory with body and soul in the love of a man whose greatness overcame me. Am I, as a woman, unattractive to you?"

"Princess, I have no heart for women."

"A mother bore you. Have you no heart for a son, Lord Tros, who shall reap where you plowed?"

He was silent, his face a mask that any intelligent woman could read. She knew she had touched his secret yearning. She believed she had uncovered his weakness. She played her last stake—sprung her secret—which Cleopatra her sister would not have done:

"Admiral Ahenobarbus has declared for Brutus, because Brutus, who slew Caesar, will restore republican government in Rome. Ahenobarbus is here to set me on my throne of Egypt, for the sake of the money that Brutus needs to pay his army. As for the corn fleet, whose is it? It shall be Brutus' gift, and mine, to the Roman people!"

Bargain by threat. Triumphant lips and questioning eyes. It did not occur to her that Tros already might have made a bargain; that if so, he would keep it or die. It did begin to dawn on her that he had told her nothing, whereas she had revealed her hand. The noise of squabbling outside the cabin door perhaps suggested to her she should rush her fences, so she squandered information on which the fate of a world might depend.

"My sister's ten ships reached here yesterday. They declared for me. They have gone with my fleet to Syria to transport some of Cassius' troops to invade Egypt. Better agree with me, Lord Tros! Can you fight Ahenobarbus? He has three quinquiremes, two biremes, three liburnians, and all my army. Did you know I have an army?"

It was a fair guess that she had some troops, who would fight for whoever paid them. It was an equally fair guess that they had not been paid since Cato had looted the treasury of Cyprus, more than three years ago. Tros made an even fairer guess than that.

"Princess, you have not had word yet with Ahenobarbus! You have only heard what Serapion, or perhaps that high priest, says was Ahenobarbus' message. And to that you have added what Lars Tarquinius has said since midnight. If you choose, you may come with me and have word with Ahenobarbus face to face."

She sat suddenly bolt upright. Then she leaned an elbow on the table, studying Tros' eyes. Hers were the eyes of a rebellious victim who had been played like a pawn in a losing game.

"I believe you would betray me to Ahenobarbus."

"Very well, then. Your own galley awaits you. Return ashore."

She stood up, and, for a moment, almost her sister's strength of character—strength of decision—revealed itself. She came toward him and put her hands on his shoulders. Her delicious scent was in his nostrils. Her dangerous, sensuous lips challenged his.

"Lord Tros—"

He interrupted. "Are you afraid to return to Salamis?"

"Lord Tros, I need you to be my weapon and my strong right arm! Slay me that dog Serapion! It is he who would sell me to Ahenobarbus, that Ahenobarbus may sell me in turn to Cassius. I think they mean to marry me to Herod. Should they set me, as their puppet, on the throne of Egypt, what shall I be without a man at my side? Herod is not a man."

Tros put his hands behind his back.

"Lord Tros, you are worth ten times ten of Cassius and Brutus! You are worth ten Antonies! That pimply puppet, Octavian, would flinch beneath the weight of your shadow! And is there a woman more worthy than I to share a throne with you and to be your son's mother?"

There came a thunder on the cabin door. Arsinoe gripped at Tros' shoulders.

"Answer me! Speak! You and I—"

He removed her hands gently, turned away from her and jerked the door ajar. A hoarse voice shouted through the opening:

"Master, both the biremes weigh anchor! Conops is returning in great haste!"

"Princess," said Tros, "my first task is to meet Ahenobarbus. I have come for the corn fleet."

"You shall see," she said, "whether I am not fit to be your son's mother! To your post, lord captain! Give me armor!"

He shook his head. He opened the door to bow her out, grimly amused by the backs of his new Jew bodyguard, who were keeping at bay a high priest who had been a king—an angry high priest and a host of even more indignant priestlings and eunuchs. Arsinoe went past Tros with a stride like Diana's. She pushed a Jew from the ranks as she forced her way through the bodyguard and faced the high priest. He flinched. Her eyes were murderous.

"Go!" she commanded. "To your temple! To your treacheries! To your prayers, O venerable lord of lies! Away with you—before I bid my admiral Lord Tros to toss you overside!"

THE ten Jews looked eager to do that. They were grinning. Tros stood speechless. He loved a bold stroke, suddenly done, loved it too well to interfere. The high priest was equally speechless; in his beard and his conical hat he looked ridiculous, with his mouth agape and his eyes stupidly staring.

"I will teach you who rules Cyprus!" said Arsinoe. "Away!" She gestured to the Jews. They glanced at Tros. He nodded. They advanced, opening to right and left to pass Arsinoe. The high priest recoiled, turned, hurried, even ran. He and his followers were crowding the gang-plank almost before Tros had reached the quarter-deck. The biremes were already within range, abreast, close together. Tros' voice rang like a clarion:

"Forward catapults!" he ordered. "Range five. Ready!"

"Range five! Ready!"

"Port oars aback! Starboard oars out! Slow ahead!"

The signal cymbals clanged. The last of the high priest's followers jumped for it, six of them fell into the sea, as the gang-plank came in and the starboard oars went out, thrusting the forty-oared galley away. Six strokes and the trireme lay head on to the biremes.

They ceased rowing. The high priest was signaling wildly; he ordered the olive-branch hauled down from the gal-

ley's masthead. A bireme, perhaps by way of warning, fired a rock from her forward *ballista*. It fell short by fifty paces. Tros accepted battle.

"Both forward catapults—fire!"

A moment's pause while the leaden balls were primed and plugged—then two thuds that shook the ship, and suddenly the whole crew roared, the rowers taking cue from the men on deck. Two hits! Both shots crashed among the rowers of one bireme, bursting between decks with a stenching cloud of colored smoke. Green and yellow flame shot skyward. The bireme veered toward the other as the oars missed time, fell into utter confusion, and ceased. There seemed to be no sand for extinguishing fire. There was a panic. Men leaped overboard and tried to swim to the other bireme.

"Full speed ahead!"

Vermilion oar-blades flashed and the foam boiled white as Tros guided his trireme straight at the other Roman ship. The Roman's only chance was to meet the attack beak first, then drop her *corvus*, spike Tros' deck and make a hand to hand fight of it. Should the beak miss, she could smash Tros' oars and lay alongside. But Tros had sea-room. He swerved, ten or fifteen paces beyond the Roman's range, and let go three screaming volleys from the starboard arrow engines as he shot past and came hard about, head on again to the Roman, who had backed oars and was turning for shelter behind the burning ship.

"Catapult him!" said a voice beside Tros.

Arsinoe was biting her lip, her bosom heaving with excitement, her clenched hands gripping her open cloak.

Tros glanced and grinned. "I think he strikes. Do you know the cost of ammunition?"

"Sink him!" she commanded. "Burn him like the other! Go in and fight! Do you fear him?"

Tros was watching the Roman. He went ahead slowly, aware of a rising wind and a strong drift shoreward, giving the Roman ample time to back out of view beyond the belching crimsoned smoke-cloud of the burning bireme.

"A good soldier!" he said. "A bad sailor! Ahiram!"

"Lord Tros?"

"Send a man forward and warn the archers not to waste arrows. That Roman means to beak us as we come by looking for him. I'm going around, on his side of the burning ship, to catch him stern on. He fights his ship from the midship citadel, so bid them sweep that when they get the word."

THE trireme, with the port oars backed and starboard oars ahead at full speed, turned in a length and a half and then curved in a short parabola, until the Roman was in full view again, trying to keep station with a rising wind on his beam. He had drifted downwind; had he gone straight ahead now his beak would have crashed the burning ship. He saw Tros too late and tried to turn and meet him.

He was caught, mid-turn, by the screaming bronze-tipped hail of all Tros' starboard arrow engines, that swept the citadel. A marksman on Tros' midship deck-house shot down the Roman helmsman. The Roman's stern ballista smashed one arrow engine with a lump of quarried quartz and an archer was dragged along-deck by the heels to be dealt with by the surgeon, but the concentrated fire from all the other engines struck down the Roman commander. There was no control.

The oars labored ahead. She beaked the burning bireme and swung sidewise, throwing the oars into confusion and opening seams in the burning ship, whose frantic crew let go the corvus, spiked the other deck and rushed over to that narrow bridge to imagined safe-

ty. Others, who could not reach the corvus, threw out grapnels.

Tros ordered "cease fire." Flames from the burning bireme, wind-blown, licked, scorched and set fire to the other, as the locked ships drifted shoreward.

"Catapult them!" Arsinoe struck Tros' shoulder. "Fire them a parting kiss from me!"

He ignored her, staring seaward, calculating how close he dared approach the shoals at harbormouth to pick up Conops before the rising sea should swamp the toiling longboat.

"Now you go to fight Ahenobarbus? Give me armor. I need armor."

Tros made no answer; he was thinking while he studied the sea and watched the arrows being counted and the baskets replenished. It was useless to set sail yet. The Levanter had come, blowing straight toward Salamis, kicking up seas like foaming hills that surged on one another, raging against the confused waves from the storm of the day before. Ahenobarbus would be bottled, on a dangerous lee.

He glanced at the ten Jews, who looked dejected, ashamed to have had no share in the fighting. He sent one of them to bring the armorer, and when the armorer came, at last he faced the princess.

"Can you fit her?"

"Yes, Lord Captain. Chain-mail. One of the new crestless helmets."

"Do it."

"And a good sword!" said Arsinoe.

"Sword, shield and dagger," said Tros.

"Aye, aye, Lord Captain."

Then: "Ahiram, we'll make sail as soon as we're clear of the shoals."

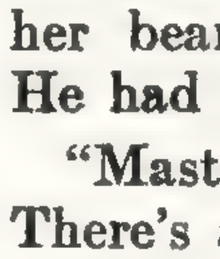
"Aye, aye, Lord Captain."

Arsinoe waited until Tros turned and could not avoid meeting her eyes. Then she stood at attention, saluted him, smiled, spoke:

"Lord Captain Tros!"

CHAPTER VI

"DIRTY WEATHER FOR A BATTLE!"



ARSINOE, without asking Tros' leave, had returned to the cabin to await the armer; but he knew that his chests were locked and there was enough else to engage his full attention. Four oars, of each of the two upper banks of the port side, had to be brought in to make room to hoist the boat, while he kept way on the ship and navigated her between the shoals against a rising wind and tumultuous sea.

It was hard work to gain an offing, but at last he had her with the wind on her beam, under three-reefed courses. He had time then for Conops.

"Master, I couldn't make that hilltop. There's a village, full of dogs and robbers and there weren't enough of us to force a landing, not to mention a surf that would have capsized us, as sure as that the Gauls can't swim. But there's a high rock on yon promontory, with a bit of a cove on the far side; so I swam ashore in the cove, but I couldn't see the quinquiremes, on account of the hill between me and them.

"It looks, though, by the set of the sea, as if they've luck and might be worse off. They can probably ride it out if their cables hold. That liburnian that went scouting has put back in a hurry; she's running from thirty or forty sail of Cilician pirates. They look to me like River Cydnus slavers."

Tros could already see the pirates. They were headed for Salamis.

"They can't go about," said Ahiram. "They'd swamp. Some spy has told them of the corn fleet."

"Aye, and that they had only two biremes to defeat in Salamis. There's little those fellows' spies don't signal to them. They'll have had word that the Egyptian and Cypriote warships have gone to Tyre or Sidon."

"We can run," said Ahiram. "There'll be a fair lee to the westward. Too late to put back into Salamis now. We had only a fathom under our keel, as it was, when we crossed the bar. If we did get in, they'd follow and give us a bad fight. They carry Greek fire, those gentry. With the port side upper oar-bank we could bring her across the wind and run westward."

Tros started at him a moment and spoke to the helmsman. He was not in the habit of spoiling officers by arguing. He gave his orders and Ahiram went to the deck in a hurry. There were plenty of men at the sheets and braces, but it was quite a trick to trim those reefed and straining sails, as Tros hauled closer to the gusty wind to gain sea-room. He had to beckon two extra men to help the helmsman, and Conops unlashed the spare steering-oar, in case the strength of three men should break the other.

There were several miles of raging sea between Tros and the nearest pirate vessel, but he could count four-and-thirty sail that staggered before the wind in far better formation than any Roman fleet could have held in such weather—felucca-rigged, two-masted, shoal-draft and rather beamy vessels, dark with men.

It looked as if they carried enough armed men to spare prize-crews for every ship of the corn fleet. Their flagship, a longer vessel than the others, plunged in the lead by a cable's length. She began signaling with arrangements of shields, painted in different colors.

Ahiram returned to the poop.

"Dirty weather for a battle," he remarked. "We can't use the catapults. If we go close and manhandle the stinkballs into them, they'll smash our oars and grapple. Greek fire's bad stuff—as bad as our stuff."

Tros made no answer. It was not his idea of generalship to offer battle unless he thought he could win, and could gain his objective by winning. Cilician pirates were crafty and determined seamen, accustomed to fleet formation and unused to giving or receiving quarter. Their largest vessel was hardly more than a third of the size of his own, but even three or four of them would be dangerous foe to engage at close quarters.

On the other hand, he had no intention of leaving the corn fleet at their mercy. They were capable of looting Salamis; such fleets had done that more than once.

But in spite of their light draft and good seamanship they would find it difficult to enter Salamis with such a tremendous sea over the bar. They certainly could not do it without passing Tros to windward. Should they try to pass between him and the land he could overwhelm them one by one with arrow-

fire and drive them ashore on the thundering beach.

Could they pass him to windward? They appeared to think not. Half of them changed helm slightly, heading up toward Tros, but that might be merely a strategic move to discover his intentions. If so, it was bad strategy. If they proposed to offer battle, they should have headed much more to windward, even at some risk of swamping, in order to come down on him with the advantage of full sails, speed and the ability to use whichever helm they pleased.

But they discovered, several minutes too late, that Tros, even with three-reefed courses, had a weather helm. His would be the weather gauge, to seaward of them, before they could come within arrow range. That left them two alternatives: they could either enter the bay down-wind and face those Roman quinquiremes, or 'bout helm and run for shelter in some harbor on the northern or western coast of Cyprus. Would they tackle the Roman squadron?

TROS gave no hint of his own intention. With his lee rail almost awash, the greater part of his crew, sprawling in the shelter of the weather bulwark, were out of the pirates' sight. The paulins had been replaced over the arrow engines to protect them from spray and bullying squalls of rain. The keenest eyes could not have guessed he was ready for battle.

On the other hand, neither could Tros see, he could only guess what the Romans were doing, whereas the pirates could see the Romans. They all changed helm, as if they thought Tros wished to pass astern of them and avoid an encounter. But it might mean that the Roman squadron was in dire difficulties and an easy prey; and if they had recognized Tros' trireme they would count on his not coming to the Roman's aid, his hatred of Rome being so notorious.

Whatever their motive, their change of the helm gave Tros plenty of time and full chance to avoid them if he pleased. He put the time to use, while Ahiram took charge of the helm and drove the trireme little by little more and more to windward.

"Conops, go into my cabin. Remember your manners. Lend the Princess Arsinoe one of my cloaks, present my compliments, and ask her to come to the quarter-deck. Lend her a hand if she hasn't sea-legs."

Conops' one eye popped with astonishment, but he knew better than to hesitate, he was off the poop in three strides and a vault. Tros ordered a series of luffs, which cost time that he could well spare, increasing the pirates' confidence that he meant to avoid them. He wanted them all to leeward; after that he could make up his mind what to do. Meanwhile, Arsinoe.

She needed no help from Conops. She had slapped his face for daring to touch her. He was rubbing his cheek, pretending it hurt, in order to let Tros know what had happened. Sea-legs she had, but not sea manners. She came up the ladder easily and scandalized Ahiram and the helmsmen by hauling herself along the rail to Tros' windward and clinging there, facing him, holding the mizzen preventer backstay, as if she were the captain and he her lieutenant.

She looked, in rather loosely fitting armor, like a mischievous Amazon. Her long hair was coiled in a leather cap beneath the crestless helmet that made her face look boyish and excitingly handsome. With her back to the wind, she let the borrowed cloak fly open, revealing the chain mail, sword-belt and Damascus sword in a crimson scabbard; naked legs, the same gilded sandals, already ruined by the spray and an impudently shortened Coan *himation* of almost transparent linen, barely to her knees.

"How do I look?" she demanded. "There is no mirror in your ogre's den, though I perceive you have two beds, so I suppose a woman is not too rare in your life as you like to pretend. Of course you dislike women, if you give them no means to make themselves presentable! I wager, if you paid women half the thought you squander on your ship, you would become as great a gallant as you are a seaman! Am I right, is it rough, or is this nothing to mention? Are we near the Romans? Where are they?"

He strode to the rail beside her, staring at the pirates, directing her gaze with his right arm.

"Are *they* Romans? All that many? They run?"

"That is a fleet of Cilician pirates. Look at me, Princess. Look straight into my eyes."

She looked unflinching. She was more interested in him than in anything else, at that moment, on land or sea, and at no pains to conceal it.

"The truth!" Tros commanded, as if he were speaking to one of his own decurions. "The whole truth! By my right arm, if you lie now, I will treat you as I would a drab from the Delos slave-mart!"

She threw her head back and laughed. "Heracles! Unused to women? I would tell you all the truth twice over for the half of that threat! Now you look like a man! I feared you were a sort of hermit, growing barnacles!

"Speak! Did you expect pirates?"

She nodded, and grew suddenly serious, the desperate, searching look returning to her eyes. But she spoke boldly, as if the armor gave her reassurance, meeting Tros' stare.

"Lord Tros, I am tired of being a shuttlecock, batted to and fro between that dog Serapion and Cinyras of Paphos, who is a throneless king turned high priest. Each of them was trying to sell me to the highest bidder. I defied Serapion. He offered me to Herod, planning to make Herod king of Egypt — two mean foxes, eating a goose before they have it caught. Cinyras, the high priest, has the tribute that has not been paid to Rome since Caesar's death stored in the vaults of the temple of Aphrodite. Plenty of money, and money rules.

"So I went to Cinyras, by night, in peril. I claimed sanctuary, and Cinyras was glad to give it. He hates Serapion. But he is afraid for the treasure; afraid to spend it; afraid that Serapion's unpaid troops may come and plunder the temple before some Roman comes to demand the arrears of tribute. So I was no better off, though I tried to persuade him to pay the troops and let them slay Serapion. Sanctuary? I was a prisoner, in the hands of a mumbling coward. And I learned that the loving sister who usurped my throne had sent a priest from Alexandria to have me poisoned."

"Were you told that by Lars Tarquinius?" Tros asked her, not doubting the poison, but only who made the attempt. If one could believe Romans, Cleopatra had tried to poison the entire senate.

Arsinoe ignored the question. "But I am foam-born." (She meant she was descended from the goddess Aphrodite.) "I have friends among the priests, of whom one conveyed a message for me to the pirate king, Anchises of Tarsus. How should I have known that *you* were coming, to be my hero and my right arm?"

TROS scowled to keep himself from laughing. Then, for a while, he watched the pirate fleet, until more than half of them were out of sight and even the scattered vesels that brought up the rear were too close to the mouth of the bay to have turned back and headed seaward. Then, suddenly:

"What did you offer Anchises?"

"The temple treasure."

"On what terms?"

"That he carry me to Brutus."

Then Tros did laugh. "Do you know Anchises? He would have had you and the treasure also! He has held more men and women to ransom than even his father, Philon, did, until Ahenobarbus cornered Philon and crucified him. Anchises would know what to do with a young queen!"

"I would rather take my chance with Anchises, who may become the ruler of Asia, than be the dupe of that dog, Serapion, who will die on a dung-heap; or than be a—" she used an unprintable word—"in Herod's harem! I am no Oriental odalisque. And now Anchises will avenge his father's death, and he will thank me for it."

"Did you expect Ahenobarbus?"

"No. But I learned of his coming. Cinyras and Serapion both expected him. Ahenobarbus took refuge from the storm in that bay yonder, and a priest brought me the news. One of Ahenobarbus' ships went aground and he had to stay to get her off, but he sent a messenger overland to say he is here for the tribute money."

"Why did you tell me he has declared for Brutus?"

"He has. He will take the tribute money to Brutus, who badly needs it for the army that he raises to oppose Octavian."

"And the corn?"

"He will deliver that also to Brutus. Armies devour like locusts. But now Anchises will make an end of Ahenobarbus and will get both the corn and the tribute money. So Brutus' army will famish, and that means anarchy—legions looking for a leader who can feed them! What *will* you do? Will you not aid Anchises?

"Lord Captain Tros," her eyes grew brilliant with almost Cleopatra's strength of gaze, and her voice thrilled with the passion to seize, and to have, and to hold, "if you should aid Anchises to destroy Ahenobarbus, he would aid you to seize Salamis! Bargain with him for half the treasure! Pay Serapion's mutinous troops! They are my troops, but he turned them against me. Crucify Serapion! Behead that old coward Cinyras! Then I am truly Queen of Cyprus! Let the Romans wage their war on one another! You and I gather a fleet of pirates and unite with Sextus! Aid one against the other until the Romans fail from sheer exhaustion! And then Egypt! My Egypt! Berenice's fate for the usurper!"

Tros stared at her. He was not squeamish, and magnanimity was rare. But Berenice, who usurped her father's throne, had not died when her father bought his throne back in a way that a crucified slave might reasonably envy. He was wondering what spiritual poison lay within the craving to be a monarch.

But Arsinoe misjudged. She thought him more than half persuaded.

"Lord Tros, you shall be King of Egypt! I will bear you a son, who shall be the greatest Pharaoh Egypt ever knew! He shall be greater than Alexander!"

She let go the preventer backstay to clutch her sword-hilt. A thundering wave that burst on the ship's beam sent her sprawling down the sloping deck. Tros saved her. Conops spluttered with emotion as his master's right arm caught, encircled her and bore her back to the weather bulwark. She clung, but Tros thrust her away, and when she had clutched the rigging he turned on Conops:

"You grin at me, you dock-rat? Where's your trumpet? Fetch it! Sound the 'Stand to battle stations!' "

IT WAS Conops' privilege to sound that on a golden trumpet fashioned like a conch-shell, that had belonged to Nearchos, Alexander's admiral. It was kept in a kind of shrine in Conops' quarters, never to be touched by any other hand than his, nor ever to be used

except when Tros committed all hands to an issue with death.

He could see around the headland now, and the sun broke between clouds to reveal the foam-encircled bay. He could see the pirate vessels wallowing almost beam to beam in massed assault, down-wind under full sail, against the anchored quinquiremes. The four liburnians, under oars but almost unmanageable against sea and wind, were surrounded; one was already grappled and repelling boarders. The grounded quinquireme was hardly visible through bursting surf that had bullied her on to the sand beyond all hope of recovery. The twang of the Romans' *ballistae* and the scream of their missiles could be heard, even up-wind, through the thunder of the sea.

Conops returned to the quarter-deck and blew the "Stand to battle stations."

"Ease all sheets, Ahiram! Hard a-lee!"

Off came the paulins; shields on men's arms replaced them to protect the twisted gut bow-strings from spray. Conops —jack-of-all-jobs—chief of staff without the title—one eye as keen as twenty—leaped from the poop to rouse the station captains and to make sure that the fire-gangs had their wet sand well distributed and ready.

Then—a sure sign that Tros meant to fight to a finish—as the trireme came around and rolled to the following sea under three-reefed courses:

"Ahiram! Full sail! Double-man sheets and halyards! Cut the reef-knots!"

Speed—muscle—discipline. They had to haul to the rhythm of bursting waves that hove the trireme's stern and spilled wind—roaring the Ionian's chantey of how Xerxes flogged the sea for daring to destroy his bridge of ships. The ten Jews, grinning, swaying to the trireme's roll, lined up ready to protect Tros with their shields from a hail of arrows. Conops returned with six men to protect the helmsmen. Tros' steward, at the head of five men, charged into the cabin to fit and man the bows—of British yew that could shoot, through the narrow openings, straight into the oar-ports of a ship alongside.

Ahiram returned to the quarter-deck, then Conops. Arsinoe handled herself along the rail to Tros' side. He ignored her, beyond noticing that Conops had brought two Nubians from the lower oar-bank to protect her with their shields.

"Ahiram!"

"Lord Captain?"

"There's one chance for those Romans. We might hit them if we used the catapults. We'll have to make a Roman's battle of it. I intend to crash that fleet of pirates. When we hit, let go everything and put the helm hard over. Conops!"

"Master?"

"Get forward and have your anchor ready. Stand by to let go when we bring her about."

Tros beckoned a messenger, one of five who had taken their appointed battle-station on the roof of the steward's cabin.

"Uncrank catapults, and have the hand-slings ready. Warn them there's the lower oar-bank for the crew that wastes one fire-ball! They may sling at a half-oar's length, and no sooner."

Then Arsinoe: "You fight the pirates? You fight Anchises?"

"Aye."

"Anchises—"

"Would he pay for the corn?"

"You huckster!"

Tros laughed. He glanced at the ten Jews. "You shall see a bargain! Your first battle?"

She nodded. "My sister borrowed Herod's army, and led it against mine, before Caesar came, but I was too young then. I have seen riots, and a skirmish, but this is my first battle."

"You are likely also seeing faith kept for the first time."

"Pledge me your faith, Lord Captain,

and I care not whom you battle with—nay, to the ends of the earth I care not!"

"Earn it!" he retorted. Then his voice blared down-wind like a battle-trumpet:

"All archers! All arrow engines! Concentrate on the nearest ships as they come in range! Wait for the word from station captains! All fire on the uproll! Ready!"

More than a hundred polished shields flashed upward. There was a rower, armed with sword and shield, to protect each marksman. The remainder crouched against the bulwarks.

First blood fell to Ahenobarbus; a netfull of quartz rocks from his citadel catapult struck the main-sail, burst on the roof of the mid-ship deck-house, brained an archer and scattered, doing no more damage.

Tros growled. "Gray boar of a blundering Roman, you shall rue that!"

CHAPTER VII

"BATTLE STATIONS! ALL HANDS!"

IN a tumult of waves and colliding hulls, amid a shriek of missiles, imprecations, shouted orders, trumpet blasts and the thunder of pirate's sails let go to wallow on the roaring wind, Tros guided his ship to the left of the pirate fleet until he had them all between him and the Romans. Then he swerved, took the wind on his counter and went headlong at them, with every stitch of canvas straining and every arrow engine, every archer filling the air with a screaming hail of arrows.

Passing between two vessels, smashing their oars to splinters, he struck a third one beam on as he tried to come about to face him. Cries of crushed and lacerated pirate oarsmen pierced the uproar. The collision threw half of Tros' crew off their feet. Full sail, groaning spars and thrumming sheets, crowded the bucking trireme onward, over the smaller vessel, rolling her under the waves—careened, smashed, crimsoned wreckage.

Leaden fire-balls, one from either bow, leaped from the four-manned slings and thumped into the reeling ships alongside. Their splendidly disciplined rowers, at the unsmashed oars on the outer sides, labored to force their vessels inward against the trireme, in order to grapple and board. The fire-balls burst; the pirates' holds became infernos of stenching smoke and fire. They fell away, down-wind, crashing into other vessels.

Tros put the helm hard over. Ahiram's men let go all sheets and braces. Blocks thundered on the deck. There was a havoc of flogging sails aloft and cordage that whipped through the ranks. It slew men, hurled them overside. It wrenched one arrow engine from its base. But the masts and spars held. There was even a chance that Ahiram's crew could save the sails, that volleyed like Great Jove's thunder as the pitching trireme came around and rolled beam to the wind, crashing into pirates to leeward. Bow-strings twanged and the air shrieked with arrows, thrummed with javelins.

Conops let go the anchor. The new flax hawser tightened like a bow-string. It held. The trireme came head to the wind within catapult range of the surf on the lee shore. Conops brought ten archers forward to protect the hawser and then made the huge spare anchor ready.

After that the quarter-deck was Ahiram's. It was Tros' job to fight his trireme. He fought her from the roof of the mid-ship deck-house, where his voice reached fore and aft and he could see all hands, all arrow engines and all the moves of the enemy. The pirates' hail of arrows curved and quarreled in the gale; hurrying ship's boys wrenched them from the deck, and from the sides of superstructures, to replenish the ar-

row-baskets. Tros, in chain mail and a gleaming helmet, was a fair mark for the pirates' bowmen. The Jews' shields caught showers of arrows, flicking them aside as their bronze tips struck the curving metal surface. Deflected arrows were a greater danger to the men near by than straight shots.

There was no chance for the pirates to run, in the teeth of that Levanter. At least a third of them had grappled the three liburnians and were drifting, at death-grips, shoreward amid waves that ground and battered them together as the sea shoaled and waves grew steeper.

Such survivors as there might be were awaited on the beach by Roman survivors from the grounded quinquireme that was already breaking up in the surf, and by villagers armed with clubs, and by ferocious dogs. Half Cyprus appeared to be lining the beach, to plunder drowned men's bodies and snatch the salvage from the surf.

Ten pirate vessels came about magnificently, under oars—a miracle of seamanship. Three had chopped their masts adrift, but the remainder had managed to lower their curving yards and stow sails. Two of them, one from either side, made a drive at Tros' hawser; they were met by Conops' marksmen with a withering independent fire, aimed at the rowers, and by screaming volleys from two arrow engines that swept their helmsmen overside.

The other wing of the pirate fleet, under their leader, Anchises, had worked in under the slaughtering fire of the quinquireme's *ballistae*.

They had grappled. The Romans were throwing fire into them. Three of the pirate ships burst into flame; their crews swarmed up the Roman's side to protect the grapnel chains and make good the bite of the spikes in the Roman's decks—a Roman's battle—but the quinquireme caught fire from the burning pirate vessels.

Anchises, in his long, red ship, rowed windward under locked shields, in a hail of javelins and arrows. He cut the quinquireme's cable. She rolled shorewood beam-on, bearing down on the burning pirate vessels, her side in flames, her deck a shambles, doomed.

Anchises signaled to his squadron to follow him to the assault on the other quinquireme, Ahenobarbus' flag-ship, that appeared to be having the best of a hot fight.

They scattered, to avoid the ill-aimed rocks and clay pots full of iron darts from the quinquireme's *ballistae*, and then double-manned the oars to get inside the range and under the trajectory of arrow engines. Tros spared them a dozen volleys, but he was too hotly engaged to observe what happened to Ahenobarbus.

To have slipped cable would have meant freedom to manoeuvre under oars, but the pirates gave him no time to man the upper oar-bank, even if he had dared to risk Greek fire being thrown through the opened hatch.

The pirates crashed alongside the port and starboard like killer-sharks after a whale. They caught the leaden fire-balls in sailcloth, cloaks, nets, anything whatever that served to dump them overside. They drove javelins and daggers into the ship's side to serve as scaling ladders, made a tortoise with shields, threw grapnels aboard, swarmed up even by the grapnel-chains, knives in their teeth, protected by master-bowmen on the decks beneath them, gaining the deck in dozens.

TIME and again Tros leaped to the port or starboard deck to hurl himself into a mêlée. He and his Jews, in a flying wedge, struck like a steel-shod avalanche wherever the pirates gained a foothold, until the swaying deck was a shambles, slippery with blood, littered with bodies

of dead and dying that rolled and slid to and fro.

The pirates, in broken groups, were hewn down or driven overside. A last charge, the full length of the deck from stern to bow, with thirty of Tros' oarsmen hard at the heels of the flying wedge, brought two or three score crowded Greeks and Syrians to bay with their backs to Conops and his archers.

Merciless, grim, breath-to-breath dagger and sword work—and a yell from Ahiram's men "Ship afire"—a frantic clangor of cymbals and roar of the skidding sand-cars — "Fire out!"—then the arrow engines, raking the decks of the pirate vessels as they slipped grapnels and drifted down-wind.

Forward by the capstan, sweating, with a dent in his helmet and blood on his armor, swaying to the plunge of the trireme, Tros grinned at Conops, who was wiping his knife on a rag he had torn from a back.

"Master, what we needed then was Northmen!"

Suddenly he gawked—stared.

Tros faced about. Arsinoe, fire-eyed, panting, with her sword gone and blood on her dagger, laughed at him from the midst of the wedge. She was blood-splashed, her helmet awry. She had thrown away her sandals.

Tros liked her then. He knew no reason why a girl who claimed to rule a third of Alexander's realm should flinch from battle. But he made no comment. There were matters of importance; he considered those. Ahiram's crew had wrought their miracle of brawn and discipline and seamanship. They had lowered the spars. They had stowed the sails, in the midst of all that tumult. They were stripping the dead and wounded pirates and pitching them overside.

Tros' steward brought wine in a silver jug and reported all well with the cabin archers. Tros drank from the jug, not listening intently to the steward's boast of having shot nine pirates through the starboard port. He gave the jug next to Conops. Then to the Jews. Last to Arsinoe, who could have the last swallow or leave it. She drank, and then tossed the jug overside.

"Lest a coward should use it!" she remarked.

Ahiram shouted from the quarter-deck and sent a messenger full-pelt for orders; he was gesturing with both arms, like a man rowing; he wanted the upper oar-bank double-manned, to come up on the anchor and gain sea-room to windward. But there was no time.

"Battle stations! All hands!"

Conops' golden trumpet blared its signal, and even the men who were dragging the wounded to the surgeon's tar-pot hurried to their posts. The ship's boys scurried away with the goat-skin wine bags. There were eighty men short at the bulwarks. Tros left eight Jews under Conops' orders. With the other two he returned to the roof of the mid-ship deckhouse, and Arsinoe followed with one shield-bearer; the other was dead.

There was a pause—a kind of supernatural hush. The howl of the storm and the thump of waves against the trireme's bow became unnatural silence, as if gods attended. Anchises, beaten away from the quinquireme, two of his ships burned and two sunk by the Roman's dolphins, with his choice between a lee shore and a last, desperate feat of arms, re-formed what was left of his squadron and signaled the vessels that Tros had beaten off.

Some of them were trying to thrash to sea; others had anchored to ride the gale and rest exhausted rowers. They rallied to Anchises' summons, gathered astern of the trireme and approached, plunging in two lines ahead, rowing like titans, the leading ships protected by a barbette of locked shields.

Tros sent thirty more archers to the quarter-deck to be under Ahiram's orders. Only two of the arrow engines

could be brought to bear astern, and of those one had been wrecked by the flying rigging. Ahenobarbus' *ballistae* could have raked the pirates' broadside. They were just within range; a proportion of shots could hardly fail to hit that sprawling target. But the Roman did nothing. If he awaited Tros' signal for help, he wasted guesswork.

"Lord Tros," said Arsinoe, "when you have slain all my friends, the pirates, will you do me the favor to teach Ahenobarbus manners?"

He spared her a grin. He had seen smoke—no need to wish the Romans any worse luck! He watched his own midship arrow engines taking instant advantage of any swerve in the pirates' line, strode to the men at the after-catapults and warned them to be frugal with the few remaining fire-balls, climbed to the quarter-deck and clapped Ahiram between the shoulder blades.

"Good comrade!"

"We should have used the oars," said Ahiram.

Tros stared astern at the oncoming pirates. True, he might have made open sea and comparative safety under oars in the teeth of the gale. Might have. It was too late now. The pirates' archers on the leading ships already were getting the range; their arrows fell spent on the deck, but in another minute they would come in screaming dozens that would test helmets and armor.

It was clear, Anchises meant to grapple the trireme's stern. They would be slaughtered like rats, but some of them would manhandle the flukes of their anchors through the cabin ports. Then the plunging vessels could lie lashed together, to be abandoned, to smash one another and sink. Anchises meant to win the trireme or perish. Tros ordered the catapult crews to bring their slings and fire-balls to the quarter-deck; he put them, too, under Ahiram's orders.

Then, with the exception of the crews who manned the arrow engines and their guards, he divided his remaining men and sent a full third of them to the bow under Conops' command. The remainder he formed up in a solid mass, all forward of the mainmast, leaving the space betwen them and the quarter-deck to tempt Anchises.

LACKING his Northmen, he had no hope of keeping the pirates off the trireme. Even now they outnumbered him two, perhaps three to one. They were desperate, well led, well armed, with certain death behind them, and with exhausted oarsmen they could not possibly escape into the storm. If they should anchor out of range they would be catapulted out of existence as soon as the storm died. They were probably short of water, and of food too. If they should make for the shore they would be wrecked in the raging surf and butchered on the beach if they could swim.

They probably had Greek fire; it was one of the pirates' secrets. If so, they would use it, unless they should see a chance to seize the trireme. They appeared to have used it on Ahenobarbus' quinquireme; her lower deck was ablaze, but the Romans, with nothing else to occupy them, had got the fire in control and were smothering it with wet sand. To fight Greek fire and pirates simultaneously would be an almost hopeless feat of arms; but they would hardly be likely to try to burn what they believed they might capture and put to their own use.

So Tros had made the stern impregnable and left the ship's waist apparently unprotected. Most of the men crouched below the bulwarks. He and a group of archers were in full view on the midship deckhouse, and the bow was crowded, but the waist of the ship was the jaws of a trap. There was another anchor ready to let go, in case Anchises should struggle to windward and cut the hawser; but the pirates' rowers were

spent. They were rowing to whip, slaves, some of them chained to the benches; they were bucketing, missing badly, laboring with the last of their strength against wind and sea. Anchises, leading on his long red slaver, saw the unprotected bulwarks, signaled his fleet and came on, flogging his foundered rowers until their oars smashed against the trireme and the heavy grapnel, swung by its chain from the slaver's spar, crashed overside and bit the trireme's deck. It bit deep. It weighed a quarter of a ton; its chain was as thick as a man's wrist.

Fire-balls lobbed into the ships astern.

A hail of arrows swept the pirates' decks; they hardly answered it, hauling along the counter under locked shields, two of them afire, their crews leaping from ship to ship; the burned ships, cut adrift to save the others, wallowed down-wind, their fettered, frantic rowers writhing in the smoke as they struggled to break free.

Two vessels, caught by a mountainous wave as they changed helm, crashed and broke like egg-shells. Four fire-balls missed and fell harmless between colliding hulls, but a fifth found its mark down the hatch of the middle of three vessels that were grappled together, made fast by one warp to the chain of Anchises' grapnel. All three crews abandoned ship, many of them drowning, some crushed between the crashing hulls, others shot down by the trireme's archers. About half of them reached Anchises' crowded deck.

He blew a trumpet-blast. It was answered from the far side, and then came the assault, from both sides of the trireme simultaneously. On the starboard side Anchises led—a six-foot Hercules, in Roman armor, with a Parthian scimitar, protected by two Scythians with studded shields. The pirate leader on the port side was a Greek, who fell dead on the deck, shot as he turned to encourage his men.

Rain, and a tempest squall of wind—a heaving deck — thunder — lightning —hordes of well-armed pirates swarming overside—and then Tros' bull-lunged order:

"Charge! Clear the main deck!"

He beckoned Conops. The pirate vessels were fast alongside and astern; there was no need now to guard the ship's bow with more than an anchor-watch of a dozen men. Over the top of the superstructures, with the Jews behind him, and a third of the trireme's crew behind them, Conops came like the heart of the storm. Tros leaped into the mêlée, the Jews hard after him. He slipped, staggered, fell on the heaving wet deck, but the flying wedge split the pirate ranks and in a second he was roofed by ten shields, hedged by ten swords, hauled out backward and helped to his feet by Conops.

"All right, master?"

"Aye. Clear away their grapnel. Cut their ships adrift."

"Aye, aye, master!"

Tros sought Anchises. There was hardly room in the crowded waist to lunge and parry. He had seen Anchises try to storm the quarter-deck and fall back on the heads of his men. Then he vanished, but there was small doubt what he was trying to do. The sheer weight of his men behind him would be likely to burst the cabin door and overwhelm the steward and his fellow-archers. He would do all the possible damage he could before the now inevitable end. If he could fire the cabin he would do that.

There was an archer, up beside Arsinoe on the top of the midship deckhouse, sending arrow after arrow down the passage in front of the door. Tros sent a Jew to command him to cease fire. Then he charged at the head of the flying wedge, through a shambles, dead and dying cluttering the deck, the pirates slashing at their opponents' faces and Tros' men putting to use the less spectacular, more

deadly swordsmanship that he had drilled into them.

Half of the pirates, under locked shields, climbing on each other, stormed the quarter-deck, but they were hurled back by Ahiram's men. On the port side, under a leader with gold earrings and raven hair, some fifty of them tried to fight their way forward. They leaped to the shrouds and were shot down by the archers on the deckhouse. They clambered along outside the bulwarks and were chopped by javelins. They charged along the blood-wet deck and fell before Tros' veterans. Each decurion and ten was a unit, taught to fight as a unit, but the pirates relied on sheer ferocity and paid for it—four, five, six for the drilled men's one.

On the starboard deck seamen and rowers, bully-damned by Conops and protected by whoever could get near to them, were rigging a purchase on the pirates' grapnel. Presently, above the clash of arms, the thunder, the roar of the storm and the cries of wounded, came Conops' triumphant brass-lunged bellow:

"All clear! They're adrift!"

The weight of Anchises' long ship, loosed and careening to a beam sea, hurling as a mountainous wave hit against the ships astern, broke chains and tore their grapnels from the oaken woodwork. Ship crashed ship. Ahiram's men broke loose the port side grapnels. Swamping, colliding, foundering, Anchises' whole fleet rolled shoreward.

THEN the pirates called quarter, and Tros let them have it, being minded that some of them might make good replacements on the lower oar-bench; and he had seen another problem—a big one that brooked little delay. A few pirates, expecting to be crucified, jumped overboard in their armor, preferring to drown, but the others threw down their arms. Tros glanced at the Roman quinquireme. He had to be quick.

Meanwhile, Anchises, unwounded, unwearied, his scimitar unbloodied, his gait a kind of cat-like crouch came forth from the shelter of the stewards' lean-to, glaring, his chin on the edge of his shield, his eyes like black opals. Every archer on the trireme drew bow at him, but Tros roared "Hold!" and the bow-strings eased. Anchises was a king by his own reckoning, a bold adventurer by any standard. He had his rights, or at least his privilege.

"Do you yield?" Tros asked.

Anchises spat. He surveyed the carnage. He eyed Tros. In an unexpectedly cultured voice he answered:

"Do I meet Lord Tros of Samothrace?"

Then Arsinoe leaped to the deck and stood near Tros, unnoticed; she was pushed aside by seamen, who were stripping pirates' bodies and heaving them overboard, dead or wounded. Conops, with his long knife flickering, came and shoved the Jews back in a line, to give Tros sword-room. He ordered corpses moved, yelled for a sand-box, spilled it and scattered the sand on the slippery deck. Ahiram shouted from the quarter-deck:

"The Roman's anchor drags, Lord Captain!"

Tros already knew it. Anchises had the right to die before Ahenobarbus could claim any favors. The crew roared as Tros strode to the midst of the deck and rutched his sandals on the spread sand. Conops, bent-kneed, crouching behind him in front of the fascinated Jews, stuttered advice:

"He's all edge, master! Watch for his backhand upper-cut! Give him the point, and keep your shield low! He'll slash at your face! When he does that, step in with a belly-ripper!"

"Keep away, little man! No interference!"

Suddenly Anchises moved. He ap-

proached like a panther, stalking toward the starboard hand to get the rain out of his eyes. There was a roll of thunder and a flash of forked lightning. He leaped at Tros as if he were the lightning's rider—down the rolling deck, upslashing with scimitar. It glanced off Tros' shield and he reeled backward with Tros' point at his midriff, splitting the chain-mail.

"Blood! First blood!" yelled Conops.

Tros had to wait for the roll of the ship; it gave Anchises time to recover and resume his crouch. Conops screamed a warning as the deck hove down to starboard and Tros lunged with the whole of his strength and weight. The pirate side-stepped, toward Tros' right, turned the point on his shield and loosed a whistling slice, back-handed, upward—by the time of a lightning-flash too late. It slid off Tros' armored shoulder and nicked his helmet.

Tros faced the rain and went in after him, forcing him back on his heels toward the Jews, who had to be beaten back by Conops. They were yelling, frantic, gesturing the gladiator-strokes that Tros should make. Sword and scimitar flashed, clashed, clangored like sledge on anvil. Tros' shield beat Anchises' face and sent him reeling down-deck, Tros after him—over him, timing his lunge to the trireme's roll. The pirate fell, slid, rolled into the scupper and, catching the roll again, scrambled free—on his feet in a second, but off-balance. Tros' point struck him between throat and chin. He fell dead.

The crew roared. The Jews danced and sang a song about a man named Joshua who made the sun stand still and slew a hundred thousand. Conops pounced to strip Anchises' armor, as Tros' booty, before some thieving seaman should steal the gold from the buckles and clasps.

Ahiram shouted from the quarter-deck again:

"Good sword, Lord Captain! But the Roman drags! Two anchors down! He drags fast!"

Then Arsinoe: "Lord Captain Tros—"

"You may have your dead pirate," he answered. "Give him a grave in Salamis and carve these 'he obeyed a royal summons!' "

She had to clutch 'Tros' arm to keep her balance on the swaying deck. Rain streamed from their helmets. Her drenched, flimsy *himation* clung to her naked legs, and her disheveled, wet hair blew against Tros' armor as he faced the rain and shouted. She could not have heard, had he spoken with less vehemence:

"Now, next, we deal with Ahenobarbus!"

"Let him wreck!" she answered.

He roared to Conops: "Bid the steward clear his crew out of the cabin!" Then, to Arsinoe, "I am a huckster, not a monarch!'

"You will betray me to Ahenobarbus?"

He laughed. He pointed to the cabin. She refused to enter it. Shivering from cold, bedraggled, but brave, she let go of his arm, dismissed him with a gesture and then followed him to the quarter-deck, where a seaman found her cloak and wrapped it around her.

CHAPTER VIII

GAIUS AHENOBARBUS, LEGATUS: S.P.Q.R.

MUTINY! The battle-weary rowers refused to man the upper oar-bank. They knew what that work meant, with the ship pitching and rolling on breaking waves. They demanded wine. Tros gave it to them, with the wine of his wrath to follow—fist-work, belaying pins, knotted ropes' ends.

With his Jews behind him, but his sword sheathed, he charged at the sulkiest groups and flung the strongest, the most vociferous, the least tractable,

heads over heels down the opened hatch. Conops worked with his knife-hilt. The decurions took courage and became aware of which side they were on.

Two Gauls, who drew their weapons at Tros, were knocked senseless and lashed to the mast, for later punishment in case their brains had survived the beating. The bards were hauled out from the deck-house surgery by the scruffs of their necks, kicked below and told to be obscenely merry if they loved their hides.

The port covers came off. The waves swished in. But the long upper oars, manned double, went out between the tholes. The wild harps thrummed and there began the oar-beat chorus about how sailors worship Aphrodite-Kallipygos—her of the Olympian buttocks—a heartening song, as full of home truths as there are hairs on a woman's head and dockside revelries in seamen's history.

Then a greater art than war, a greater miracle than love. Seamanship! Mastery —absolute courage — skill beyond the heart or competence of common mortals —godly, superb, unsung, incomparable stuff, for which sins are forgiven.

Up-anchor, a broken capstan and the taut flax cable walked in, with the deck awash as the trireme buried her bow and shipped it green. A half hour's battle, man relieving man at the blistering, bruising, bucking white-ash oars.

A punctured goatskin full of whale oil was shot on a line from a forward catapult to slick down the breakers—a slick that spread down-wind and eased the Roman's oar work; they, too, had manned their upper sweeps to ease the strain on the anchors, but the wallowing, top-heavy quinquireme bullied her cables and rolled her oar-ports under, nearer, each roll, to the beach where the pirate and liburnian hulls lay smashed in the hammering surf and two more quinquiremes, keels upward, rose and fell amid bursting breakers.

Thunder and lightning flashed amid torrents of icy rain that made high noon a dim gray gloaming. Two scraps of sail for the aid of the laboring helmsmen set by Ahiram's trusties in the teeth of a squall that blew the stinging spoondrift mainmast high. Fathom upon fathom made good, diagonally, crabwise, until the quinquireme wallowed astern at last and, at a signal they anchored. It held. And the thick flax hawser held. There was magic of helm and storm-sail then, manoeuvring for position, until Conops let go the second anchor. Then, the cymbals clanged, "Rest oars!" and the after starboard catapult shot a bag full of sand on a line to the quinquireme.

It killed a man, but the Romans bent on their hawser; it was walked aboard, and for a while both ships lay plunging

to the trireme's anchors. The Romans ignored Tros' signals. He had to shoot them another sand-bag, with a written message, threatening to cut them adrift; but after that they hauled up on their own anchors, let go again close to the trireme's stern, and eased away.

For a night and a day and the following night the trireme rode out the storm, with an afterwatch ready with axes to chop through the Roman's hawser in case the forward watch should signal that the anchors dragged, or that the chafing anchor-cables looked like parting in the strain.

Tros spent hours with the wounded. He ordered the dead laid in the hold, for a seaman craves shore-burial and seemly ceremonies for his bones. He attended to the exemplary flogging of some mutineers, studied the battle damage, promoted men to replace dead decurions, fettered the captured pirates in the gloom of the lower oar-deck to acquire a yearning for the good opinion of their fellow-men; slept, when he did sleep, in a hammock in the midship deckhouse, and avoided Arsinoe.

When the rain ceased, she appeared clean, on the quarter-deck, in one of his best cloaks and still wearing the chain-mail, but without the helmet, drying her hair in the wind. She made no attempt to speak to him.

"She is dangerous," said Conops. "Master, mark my word: a silent woman is worse than a lee shore. I'd as lief trust a Cretan pilot!"

"Aye," Tros answered. "Little man, you're a wizard at reading women. I am warned. I will be careful."

THE Levanter died the second midnight, and the following dawn broke splendid on the hills of Cyprus. Tros was on the quarterdeck before daylight to smell the weather and judge the weight of the ground swell. So he saw a boat leave the quinquireme and waited for the young cockerel in a plumed helmet who stepped from the stern-sheets, clambered aboard and came up the steps to the quarterdeck without saluting. He did make a sort of gesture to Tros with his right hand.

"Are you the ship's captain? Admiral Ahenobarbus bids you let go our hawser."

Tros eyed him, signing to Conops to keep still.

"Tell your Admiral Ahenobarbus he may come and see me."

"He is at breakfast."

"I will give him exactly six times as long as it took them to row you from ship to ship. Fall away!"

"Bold talk from a pirate!"

"Battle stations!"

Conops' golden trumpet blared. There was a clangor of arms and a thunder of bare feet. Paulins came off, as the whip-crack-voiced decurions marshaled their men. The great catapult weights went climbing, and Ahiram's seamen sent the yards up, with the sails brailed, ready to be sheeted down in an instant.

The red-plumed cockerel in an equestrian cloak went overside without ceremony and his boat's crew did a good job of rowing for fear-ridden slaves. Very soon, indeed, Ahenobarbus put his ten-oared barge into the water. He was followed into it by two officers—splashes of splendor against the quinquireme's black freeboard. Ahenobarbus was wearing a general's cloak and a helmet that shone in the morning sun.

A veteran—an old-style republican Roman, with an iron-gray beard, gray eyebrows and deep-sunk eyes, he climbed aboard with dignity and stood still, expecting a salute from the entire ship's company. He received none, having neglected himself to salute the quarterdeck. He would not have saluted a king who didn't first salute the majesty of Roman arms.

He stood staring about him. From behind him, on his left hand, Lars Tar-

quinius watched Tros with the eyes of a doubtfully daring wolf. He appeared to be wearing a borrowed helmet; it was a bit big for him, plumed like a tribune's.

Less than half a pace behind Ahenobarbus, on his right hand, stood his flag-lieutenant, pock-marked, short, square-shouldered, with a snub nose and eyes like gray agates devoid of sentiment or humor—eyes that missed nothing. All three wore the short Roman sword and regulation military armor. Two paces behind them stood a Greek slave, a scribe, a short-sighted, elderly, almost bald Sicilian in a gray woollen smock, with a knitted shawl over his shoulders and a brass-bound box for his writing materials.

Arsinoe came from the cabin, dry-haired, tidy, with her sandals regilded by the armorer from Tros' store of gold-leaf that he kept for the serpent on the trireme's bow. The sudden clank as her bodyguard stood to attention startled the flag-lieutenant; he nudged Ahenobarbus, who glanced at her and then stared at Tros. Tros came down from the quarterdeck with Conops behind him. The ten Jews, lined up below the steps, saluted; Conops gestured to them; they followed Tros, who followed Arsinoe into the cabin. Conops approached Ahenobarbus with studied insolence, omitting the slightest gesture that might be mistaken for respect.

"This way, Romans. My master grants you personal protection."

He led the way to the cabin. Ahenobarbus, totally unruffled, unimpressed, too insolent to care to flatter Tros with the slightest display of pique or irritation, strode through the doorway, entered without greeting, and sat, with a clank of body armor, uninvited, in the chair at Tros' left hand.

Tros was seated at the end of the table, facing forward, and Arsinoe sat at his right hand, facing Ahenobarbus, who stared at her without the slightest change of expression. She returned the stare, equally unembarrassed. Conops stood behind Tros. The Jews were lined up, five on either side, with their backs to the bunks. There was no place for the flag-lieutenant and Tarquinius except a long chest that had been pulled up near the table; Conops signed to them to be seated on that. The slave stood behind Ahenobarbus' chair.

Tros gave his helmet and sword to Conops, but Ahenobarbus ignored the hint; all three Romans sat covered.

"Who is this woman?" Ahenobarbus asked suddenly in a quarterdeck voice, harsh, authoritative. When he spoke he looked ready to fight.

"Has Lars Tarquinius not told you? I am Queen of Cyprus."

"Yes, he said so. Are you this pirate's prisoner?"

"This is Lord Captain Tros of Samothrace."

"So I have heard. I asked, are you his prisoner?"

"No. What is your business, Roman?"

"I command in these seas. I am here to demand the tribute, two years owing, and to take away the corn fleet, fifty ships, lying in Salamis harbor."

Not even her eyelids flickered. "By whose authority?"

"Marcus Junius Brutus, general commanding the eastern forces of the senate and the Roman people."

He removed his helmet, revealing a close-cropped head of iron-gray hair. Arsinoe had impressed him. Tarquinius and the flag-lieutenant also removed their helmets. But Ahenobarbus seemed to think that concession enough; he growled at the slave, who produced a raw turnip from under his shawl. It had already been pared. Ahenobarbus bit into it and chewed.

"I was at breakfast," he remarked.

Arsinoe spoke with a changed voice and with scorn in her eyes:

"How much tribute?"

"All the treasure they have in the

vaults of the temple. General Brutus needs it."

The slave whispered and passed him a slip of parchment. He handed it to Arsinoe.

"Lars Tarquinius has bestirred himself for once. Those are the figures."

Never a Ptolemy lived who cared for treasure in others' keeping. Hereditary clutcher of birds in hand and spendthrift of others' promises, she shrugged her shoulders.

"You agree?" asked Ahenobarbus. "Sign that—"

"In exchange for what?"

"For being Queen of Cyprus. I will answer for Serapion and Cinyras. If they have forgotten Cato's lesson they shall learn it again."

The slave leaned forward and pushed pen and ink toward her. She glanced at Tros, who looked straight before him.

"Shall I?" she asked.

"Princess," he said, "I am neither King of Cyprus nor a minister of state!"

"You are a pirate," Ahenobarbus remarked.

SHE signed. The slave took the document. Promptly Tros produced a parchment of his own and thrust it in front of the Roman.

"Now you have money! This—here—is the price of the corn, all reckoned, counting interest and charges until tomorrow noon. This other document is my authority to hand over corn against money."

Ahenobarbus stared.

"That you sunk my biremes," he retorted when he had recovered his presence of mind, "gives you no authority to deal in contraband. Has the fleet such documents as Romans recognize?"

"Your biremes opened fire on me," Tros answered. "Were there any survivors?"

"I have four hundred men on the beach," said Ahenobarbus.

"Aye, and a half-burned quinquireme within bow-shot! That I saved you from Anchises doesn't make me much beholden to you. If you think otherwise, make haste to your ship, and clear for action! I will give you time to haul your anchors."

The Roman eyed him coolly: "I have always heard you are rashly gallant. Such conceits will be your finish. But it is true, my quinquireme isn't fit at the moment to fight. You have me at a disadvantage. I will pay for the corn. General Brutus needs it more than money—at the moment."

"You agree to the figures?"

"Yes. I have no way to check them."

"Sign then."

Ahenobarbus scrawled his name at the foot of the parchment, adding the words "legatus, S.P.Q.R." Then his stubborn face set in what might be a thin-lipped smile or might be malice:

"Tros, I offer you a commission from General Marcus Junius Brutus."

Tros snorted: "That assassin?"

"A noble Roman!"

"An ignoble parricide! Ahenobarbus, may the gods of ill-chance put your Brutus into Caesar's shoes, for that would mean the end of Rome, and then there may be honorable living for such Romans as are worthy of it."

Sententious nonsense—poetry! You talk like Brutus himself! Very well, you prefer your freedom to be caught—and crucified. You may have it. Lars Tarquinius!"

Tarquinius stood up with the glittering light of triumph in his eyes.

"I have appointed Lars Tarquinius, equestrian, formerly of Gabinius' light cavalry, to be liaison officer between the court of Queen Arsinoe of Cyprus and the headquarters staff of General Brutus. He will supply her with a bodyguard. I will leave with him a tribune, a centurion and one hundred men, for whom I have no room at present on my

flag-ship. Have you any of the pirates?"

"Yes," said Tros.

"They should be crucified. Do you want them?"

"I can put them to better use than crucifixion."

Ahenobarbus seemed to doubt that, but he let it pass.

"I will give them the alternative," he said, "of enlistment for the Queen of Cyprus. Roman discipline—Tarquinius shall see to that—should do them good. They fought, I thought, with vigor and considerable spirit. Will you hand them over in Salamis?"

"They shall have their choice," Tros answered. "That, or my lower oar-bench."

"Very well then. You precede me to Salamis? Tarquinius shall march my marines to the city. A short march. He will be there before we are. He will have authority from me to see that the temple treasure is conveyed to the jetty, where it shall be counted in the presence of witnesses and I will take your receipt in exchange for the corn. There will be a balance; you may have that for saving my ship in the storm."

"You may have my lee!" Tros answered. "Give the balance of the money to the Princess."

"Very well. She may pay the troops I leave with her. About the corn fleet. The unfortunate disaster to my squadron leaves me with only one *quinquireme* to escort fifty ships, only as far as Tarsus, but in pirate-infested waters. Is it within your view of the bargain to keep me in sight as far as Tarsus?"

"On whose word?"

"My commission is from Marcus Junius Brutus."

"No."

"Deal with me then."

"Yes."

"You will bring up the rear?"

"I will ease sheets to the first fair wind within sight of the mouth of the Cydnus River."

"Good. My commission will continue to protect you until you are out of sight of land. You shall not be pursued from the Cydnus."

"Anything else?"

"No."

Tros stood. Ahenobarbus stood. The flag-lieutenant stood. Conops and the slave made faces at each other. Arsinoe laughed. It was Conops who broke the tension. He barked at the Jews:

"General—salute!"

There was a clash of arms. Exactly simultaneously, Tros, Ahenobarbus and the flag-lieutenant exchanged gestures. Tarquinius was a bit late with his, he was hiding a smile. Then they all turned and saluted Arsinoe. She merely nodded, looking dark-eyed, leaning gracefully limp, in shadow, in the corner of the great oak chair. She remained in the cabin.

On deck, Tros gave Ahenobarbus all the compliment that any admiral could ask. But it was personal to him. The clang of shields—and the Roman knew it—was no acknowledgment of Rome's authority as mistress of the sea. The manned rail roared, but the word was "Tros! Tros!" Ahenobarbus actually smiled as he rowed away. He even waved his hand in farewell.

THE trireme, rolling on the long-backed swell, was halfway back to Salamis before Arsinoe came to the quarter-deck. Again she stood to windward of Tros with her back to the rail, no longer in armor, looking feminine and distant, so that Tros hesitated to speak to her. For a long time she gazed astern at the wallowing *quinquireme,* but at last she spoke:

"Huckster!"

He grinned, not unfriendly. He was thinking of Esias and his own fifth.

"You have sold a kingdom for a bag of money!"

"Nay, nay. For another's faith in my

given word. A right good bargan, well kept."

"A woman's faith? You love Charmion? You love that bitter-sweet virago with a flat breast?"

He laughed. "Princess, as your shrewdness perceives, I am a huckster. My love, such as it is, is in the market for the highest bidder. But the bids must be in terms of what I like, not what I need to have: what I admire, not what I can have for the mere taking. I might love you, if you had the oaken merit of that insolent old boar, Ahenobarbus. Do you understand me? The world is full of women, to be had for a moment's frenzy, or a life of plump ease, or a war of wits and poisonings and treachery and the gods know what else. But the mother of my sons shall be a woman whom I neither doubt nor need to question. I shall know her when I find her."

"Do you think you know me?"

"Partly. I shall know you better when I have seen your hand on Cyprus. Only a little kingdom. Mine is only a ship, but I am master of it."

"You will come and see me?"

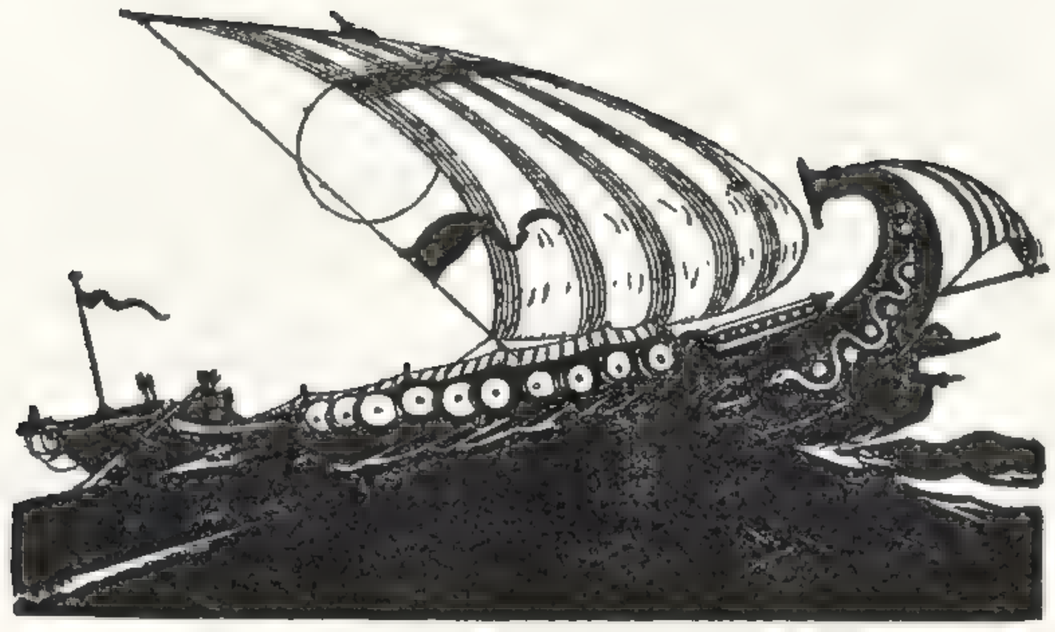
"Aye," he answered.

"Truly?"

"If I live. I have dangerous work to do. There are some loyal Northmen to be rescued."

"From a pirate? From the Romans?"

"No, no. From a woman. From a shrewd, wise, desperate and ruthless woman."



BLACK PANTHER

By GORDON MacCREAGH

THE scar-cheeked white man prowled amongst the animal cages on the sweltering Malayan dock, staring into them with a red-eyed fascination—self-effacing, furtive as an animal himself, almost as unclothed, almost one of them.

He seemed almost to understand their talk, as one who had lived amongst their very lairs. For he stopped in front of a civet-cat pen and stared intently at the silently suffering creature in its dim corner; then he fetched a pan of water from in front of another cage and squatted, holding it close to the bars. The frantic plunge of the civet toward the drink proved his understanding.

Another white man, sprucely dressed in a white solar topee and a khaki suit, cut in the snug-waisted style that betokens the ex-soldier, prodded his rump with a square-toed boot. He barked orders.

" 'Ere you, sundowner you. Git awai from those there caiges. The professor don't want any loafin' around 'is hanimals. This is valuable cargo. Git back there. Hout with yer."

With the springy speed of an animal Scar Cheek whirled and arrived standing on the balls of his feet. The soldier started away from the sudden ferocity of it.

"Ho!" He said confusedly. And, as he recovered his poise, "Ho!" again. "The Wild Man o' Borneo 'imself. Whiskers an' all; di-reck from the depths o' the 'orrible jungles. Kills 'is victim with a single scowl an' heats 'im raw." He pointed over his shoulder with a malacca swagger cane that identified his ex-military status as a former sergeant of the Something-or-Other Fusileers. "Get back there, beach-comber. 'Op it."

Scar Cheek might have taken the dapper ex-military man and broken him in two with his bare brown hands. But before the conscious superiority of a

white man, entrenched in respectable authority, the hot glare went out of his eyes. Almost meekly he said:

"I was just giving this poor beast some water."

"Ho!" The other repeated his favorite preamble to speech. "A bloomin' Yankee, eh? Down an' out on a British beach?" He laughed; not ill-naturedly so much as with an ingrained pride of far-flung empire. No need to expatiate upon how slim a chance a "foreigner" had, in these hard days, of finding any sort of a job that might lift him out of the hopeless morass of tropical beachcombing.

Yet a miracle opportunity was there. The soldier looked over the ragged, sunbaked man appraisingly.

"P'raps the proffess'd taike yer on. Natives is a bloody nuisance when we gets to the 'ome ports. 'E wants a white man. None o' ours will 'ave it; but there's a job open, cleanin' monkey caiges."

Hurriedly he stepped back, more startled than before.

"Ho? Too blinkin' proud, are yer? Horl right; don't bite at me, Bosco. That's all I got to offer. There's another job, lookin' after the big cats. But it taikes a man to 'handle the cats. Guts. The kind o' bowils that'll 'old a white man's 'ead up an' never let 'im get on the beach. So 'op it, you. Git back in the mob there. Stay on yer blawsted beach an' rot. Yer won't get another chance in a 'urry."

Like an animal, hot-eyed, snarling before dominant authority, Scar Cheek backed away.

It was something of an event on Tanjong Pager dock number four. The big Hagenbeck shipment was ready to go on board the dingy B. I. freighter that lifted to the slow Malay Archipelago swells, screeching piercingly against the thick teakwood fenders, hot with incessant friction.

Erich Blauveldt, world-known zoologist and collector, had come in from eight strenuous months in the jungle with a collection that almost satisfied even his restless soul.

A half-dozen elephants grumbled and swayed at their heavy heel ropes at one end of the dock. But elephants are common. Blauveldt had much better than they. A ponderous crate of thick iron bars held a gray bulk of overlapping hide layers that incessantly rasped a great yellow saber of a horn on its nose against the bars. That beast represented more money than all the elephants put together.

Red, hairy arms thrust from between the stout slats of other cages. Smaller white ones darted from others in a ceaseless search for anything within reach that might turn out to be food. There was money in orang-outangs and silvery gibbons, too.

Farther down the line, growls and snarls advertised the implacable hate of the big cats. Tigers, leopards, jungle cats of various sorts, and no less than a pair of the rare black panthers.

IT WAS before the cats—held at a safe distance by turbaned Sikh policemen, imported from India — that the populace milled and chattered and told awesome stories of fantastic exaggeration. For to the natives of Malaysia these represented the skulking death that overtook some five thousand of them every year.

Chinamen, Malays, Hindus sweltered and jostled on the sun-drenched dock. Poor people all, who lived on the jungle fringes, close to the death that prowled at their very elbows. Amongst them a sprinkling of Eurasians, self-consciously aloof, knowing themselves to be despised by the white Sahibs on account of their mixed blood, and hated by the natives on account of the trace of white that led them to arrogate to themselves a futile superiority.

This was the "mob" to which the

spuriously superior white man relegated the down-and-outer. The gulf between them was more impassable than any that separated Dives from Lazarus.

A situation of conspicuous shame for the white outcast, aggravated by the nudges and snickers of the natives since a white man, once "down" in a brown man's country, is caught in a clutching quicksand of circumstance from which there is no escape; natives cannot help him, and white men, in their cast-iron code of necessary prestige, like to forget that the fallen brother exists, down and desperate, conspicuously dead and damned.

The more so since Scar Cheek stood out from all white men, in that he was marked by three livid scars that raked across his face from nose to ear. And yet the man with fierce pride refused to grasp at the life line that might lift him out of the slough—cleaning monkey cages—aggravating his conspicuousness.

Impelled by whatsoever hungry urge it was that drove him, he had the hardihood to flout the order of entrenched authority and to edge forward again and stand wide-legged, glowering with set face, as before, at the reeking cat dens.

With incautious fascination he peered into the obscurity of a black-panther cage. A screaming snarl came from within and a black shape flung itself at the bars, level with his face. Vicious as sable sin, a yellow taloned paw flashed out and raked the air a scant inch from his eyes.

As fast as the cat, the man hurled himself backward a full ten feet. Quick drops of sweat collected on his forehead. His great scars pulsed livid. He stood tense and staring.

A tall Sikh policeman, black beard parted ferociously in the middle, stalked forward with officious orders, glad to show his authority over a down-and-out white.

"Away, Sahib! Away! It is forbidden to approach the cages. Next time the beast might draw more than the hot drops of fear."

With the ferocity of the panther itself, Scar Cheek snarled at the big policeman.

"You go plumb to hell, *parawallah;* and keep your blasted paws off of me."

The Sikh policeman started away from him as precipitately as the man had leapt from the panther. He could not understand the words; but he could see with his eyes the something that smoldered in this white man's soul, that held him furiously down, but not out.

For the sake of the white man's prestige—that all-important fetish that the white man has built into his own caste system in the East—it is forbidden to native policemen to hustle even beachcombers. So the Sikh was not ungrateful for the excuse to go away and summon a Sahib.

It was the ex-sergeant who came fussing forward once more. He was the chief assistant, it seemed; major domo, baggage master and what-not, of the great zoologist; selected on account of his supposed knowledge of the native language. In angry Cockney indignation he shouted:

"Ho? It's you again, is it? You 'eard me orders the fust time, didn't yer? S'welp me, but you've got a crust, muckin' around the cats again. It taikes a man, I tell yer, to 'andle the cats; an' yer better not let me 'ave to tell yer again."

Snarling words spat from Scar Face.

"Blast your sneering soul! I can handle 'em all right. I'll show your damned professor!

The soldier stood, his arms akimbo, his head cocked in derision.

"Ho? Yer think so? Hindeed? Horl right; show me. Just you go stand a foot near that caige for no longer'n 'arf a minute. I'll promise yer the job—what's left of yer."

For a blazing moment it seemed that Scar Face would take up the perilous

dare. His hot, red eyes glared at those that flamed green from the dark cage. The big muscles tensed in his body. In silence they stared at one another, jungle man and jungle beast. What the eyes said to each other no turbaned policeman nor sprucely dressed ex-soldier could know. But it was from the man's eyes that the heat died first. From red they faded to cold gray. The big muscles slackened slowly. The livid pulse ebbed from the scars.

The soldier pointed with his swagger cane again.

" 'Op it, Big Mouth. Back where yer belong. Back with the mob there."

Scar Cheek's voice was meek once more.

"I wanted to point out that this cage is just about ready to give way at the corner there. That black devil has gnawed the wooden cross pieces pretty near through; as soon as he gets a couple of them out of the way he'll spread the iron bars like wet macaroni sticks and be out, and then, in the mad scramble, he'll likely get hurt."

The soldier gave one startled look; and his excited yelp called for the quick assistance of attendants, while he cursed Scar Cheek for a crazy fool.

" 'E'll likely get 'urt, says you. Crazier'n most Yankees. It's us would get 'urt. That black devil'd commit bloody murder in this crowd. Hout o' me way, 'ere."

Attendants came running, jabbering as natives must when there is any excitement, getting in one another's way, clamoring. With stout wire, gingerly, they set to interlacing the weakened bars.

The velvet-furred demon in the cage, seeming to realize that its hope of freedom was passing, fought like a very devil. Its snarls rose in pitch to whining screams; it spat in explosive bursts of a steam jet. Lightning black paws flashed from the opening it had made. They seemed barely to brush past a native. But he fell back shrieking, blood spouting from his side.

The mob of onlookers shrank away. Their shrill chatterings of alarm added to the confusion. The caged monkeys howled in unison. Other beasts roared.

The ex-soldier supervisor nervously handled a gun. Panic hung like a cloud in the air, ready to break.

But somehow the job got done. Sufficient wire was interlaced to close the holes. For the time being the damage was repaired, patched. It would have to be done right as soon as opportunity offered.

FOR the present another commotion was growing—outside of the dock this time; beyond the mob that clustered, round-eyed and yammering, at the gate. Sikh policemen shouted; the populace surged this way and that; authority bestirred itself to officious zeal.

"Way there! Aside! Make room! Way for His Excellency!"

"Lumme!" The Cockney assistant gasped. "The governor's party! 'Ere, one o' you niggers. Mop up that blood in a 'urry. 'Op to it."

Sweating policemen shoved the crowd aside, stepping on its own toes, shrilly cursing those behind, milling, staggering, reeking to the hot heavens of perspiration and chewed betel nut and all the sickly perfumes dear to the polyglot populace of the Straits.

Through the lane, aristocratically calm, cool in *tussore* silk clothing, came Sir the Honourable Hugh Protheroe, Governor of the Straits Settlements, with a small party of the elite of Singapore, escorted by Doctor Blauveldt.

Some of the Eurasians ventured upon the familiarity of lifting their shabby solar topees. The governor looked through them—the white man's caste system in the East has its "untouchables." Scar Cheek shrank hurriedly out of view.

A collection of animals in cages might hardly be expected to excite the interest of the blasé aristocracy. But almost anything served as a measure of relief from the boredom of the endless round of dinner parties and bridge teas that were about all that Singapore had to offer to the social set, and Blauveldt's was an exceptionally fine collection.

The huge rhinoceros attracted most attention, for he was a rare catch. But the zoologist poohpoohed him.

"*Ja*, he iss nice, R. Sondaicus, a fine specimen enough. Two lifes he costed me. Two of my Dyaks, to whose wifes I haf been gompelled to bay indemmity worth twenty Dyaks. An exbensive beast, ja. But gome, I show you here my two brizes."

He led the way to the two cages containing the black panthers. With affectionate pride he poked his walking stick between the bars to stir them up.

"These, chentlemen und ladies, are worth more—not for money worth—but for science, worth more as my whole catch. A male und a female. Mit this pair I hope to prove to some pig-head professors that not every black panther iss a freak of melanism. I think I show with these that they breed true to form, that I haf a distinct species, *felis pardus melas*."

He beamed upon his guests, looking for approval. They gave him of their best.

"Indeed," they murmured politely. And, "You don't say so."

The scientist's bushy yellow brows rose in genuine wonder at the obtuse disinterest of the laity for a theory of epochal importance. He shrugged. Well, education must be tempered to the mental capacity of the recipient. He continued his lecture along more popular lines.

"Ja, chentlemen. Der most dangerous beast. Smaller as der leopard, much lighter, but of all animals in all Malaya he has der worst temper, und neffer iss he in a goot humor. Of all animals he stands forth alone—untamable."

"But Professor, I thought—"

The professor raised a thick finger to hold the attention of his class. "Wait, please. There exist in der world men who can handle black panther—not tame him, but control him. I count those men on der fingers of one hand."

"But, Professor," the obstreperous pupil insisted. "I've seen it done. We all saw it. There was a man here with a circus, and he had an act with black panthers. Like kittens they were. He even put his head into one of their mouths."

The professor laughed enormously. "*Ja, ja*, you haf no doubt seen. In der menagerie business iss also its secrets for amusing of der ignorant public. Mit a chlorine solution iss an ordinary leopard partially bleached, and mit *paraphenylene-diamine* iss it dyed black, und there you haf der great, der unparalleled, der intrepid Captain So-and-So mit his curdling-of-the-blood black panther act. Ho, ho. Yess, it iss easy. Und you pay your goot money for your admissions.

"But!" The professor held up his didactic finger again. "Der men who control real black panther, I count them mit one hand. I know them all. There iss Jennings, who is mit Jamrachs in Liverpool; there iss Meyer und Speckbrock mit us in Hamburg, and there iss Steve Harisson, who iss—who *was* once a goot man too. But he iss finished. He had his accident—as comes his accident to effery man who works mit der cats—und he lost his nerves. He iss done. For when a man loses his nerves, believe me when I tell you, der cats know it more quicker as does a man.

"So there are only three in der world. I know them all. Such a man iss worth much money. One of them I wish I had for my beautiful black devils here. But—" he shrugged ponderously and sighed— "But come. Now I show you

some other things that one does not so often bring out from der chungles. From *seladang*, der largest of der Asiatic cattle, down to mouse deer that stand in der palm of your hand. From twenty-foot *python molurus*, which iss not big enough to harm a strong man—in spite of der cinema films—down to eighteen-inch *krait, bungarus coeruleus*, who iss big enough to kill an elephant. Come, I haf here some very fine things—not so fine as my *felis pardus melas*, but some nice collections."

The professor led his party on a protracted tour of instruction, for which his reward was that the Governor became a patron of science by taking him off to tiffin.

Scar Cheek came out of his hiding and stared hungrily after the party, so cool, so untroubled. White folks, Sahibs, who represented everything that he was not, some of the things that he might once have been.

USEFUL activities recommenced. The steamer awoke to life. Lascars in baggy blue dungarees and red sashes bustled about with the aimless flurry of ants, shouted with the aimless energy of apes. Donkey engines rattled. Steel cables slithered dizzily up and down derrick booms. Ponderous hooks swung perilously over the heads of workers and hovered over the animal crates.

The ex-soldier assistant screamed up at the steamer rail. A white man in pajamas, whose cap, set awry over one side of a tousled head, proclaimed him a second mate, appeared at the bridge.

The assistant screamed at him that no such thing as taking the animals on board could be dreamed of just now. The professor would have to be present personally to see that every cage should be placed exactly where he wanted it.

The mate let him lose his breath. Then, with careful precision, he spat into the water through the narrow slit between the dock and the ship's side and told him:

"Listen, head keeper. It's not me that's wantin' your filthy monkeys stinkin' up this ship. I'm just takin' owner's orders. It's costin' them one hundred pounds British money for every hour we lay alongside this bloody dock; an' they don't care a Scotch engineer's hoot if your professor is lunchin' with Lord Panjandrum an' a chorus o' bull angels. I got orders to load."

The Cockney blustered; he gave orders that not a crate should be touched; he claimed imminent damage to valuable animals; he prophesied accident through inexpert handling; he threatened legal action.

The mate said: "Your noise is costin' the owners one pound, thirteen shillings an' four pence for every minute. An' I know that, not 'cause I'm a mathematician, but 'cause they have the skipper read it to us every Sunday morning for religious service. You run along and get a stop order from the agents, two-seventeen Lowrie Street, an' I'll listen to you some more. Till then, I'm loadin' stinkin' freight."

Lascars swarmed about the dock, trailing great slings of rope behind them. They heaved up crate ends and inserted their slings; they decided they did not want just those crates just then; they dragged their slings free and inserted them beneath other crates; they shouted to the derrick handlers; the derrick handlers shouted to them; they stood in groups and shouted at one another.

Everything proceeded exactly according to formula; the always astoundingly inept, noisy, higgledy-piggledly process of lascars loading ship. What matter to them whether they loaded animals or bales of jute. It was the law of the changeless gods of the East that thus was freight loaded onto a ship. As it was also the law that to all loading belonged its inevitable percentage of

accidental breakage; for thus did the gods try the souls of men. What man could alter the will of the gods?

Certainly not the mate, who had long ago learned his experience of loading many ships at Oriental ports. He was wisely content with seating himself in front of an exhaust ventilator that belched its noisome, but comparatively cool, air from the bilges, and to direct the placing of the crates, if and when, they dangled tentatively above the yawning holds.

The ponderous derrick hooks swung in perilous arcs over the dock. Men ducked their heads and cursed the handlers. Crates traveled screechingly over the floor, gouging great splinters before they canted over and swung dizzily free. Scrap iron tangled with tarpaulins and ripped great triangular rents. Empty crates hurtled about with heavy impact. The hooks descended again and fumbled clumsily amongst cage tops.

And so, since accidental breakage was a law of the gods, it inevitably came. Arising out of a trifle of carelessness, appalling in its suddenness, horrific in its consequence.

A heavy wooden cage swung clear of the floor. It zoomed in a wide arc across the dock. Men ducked, cursing. It missed them, but inanimate cages could not duck.

A corner of the swinging cage tipped a corner of a stationary one. Just tipped it, but sent it bowling over and over. It was the will of the inscrutable gods—who try the souls of men with their terrors—that that crate should contain one of the black panthers, and that it should be the one that had been patched with wire.

Just tipped. An accident of a few spare inches. But it was enough. The iron bars bulged; staples flew; a gap opened up. Shouting men ran to repair damage—and then stopped short on their heels. Their shouts froze in their throats.

An incredibly small gap; an impossible gap. But the cat creatures never need any great space. Almost before the cage ceased rolling, the spitting, snarling black form had squeezed through and flattened itself to a tense crouch.

THE silent men backed away—slowly at first, then, as their thoughts began to function on all the possibilities that might develop out of this accident, faster; in converse ratio to their distance from the beast, their voices rose from dry, throated mutterings to the full clamor of fear.

The beast remained immobile, pressed flat to the boards; only its thick-furred tail lashed like a snake from side to side. For the moment it was more startled by its sudden liberty than were the men. It required longer to think.

The yelps of the dock workers advertised the danger to the further crowd. The name was enough. *"Karimau Panga!"* The black panther!

Literal bedlam broke loose on the dock. In Malay, Hindustani, Chinese, various up-country dialects men, women and children all yelled together, and a rush of naked feet made galloping thunder over the boards—and at the gateway the whole mass jammed itself tight.

The big cat was startled out of its immobility to slink behind the shelter of piled cages. There it would collect its wits to plan further escape. And the only further escape was by way of the gate.

The Cockney assistant—give him credit—he was brave enough, but this calamity was far removed from his ex-military experience. He pranced in uncertainty. He shouted orders as absurd as they were hurried. In the same breath he countermanded them and gave other orders.

Nobody listened to any of them. Those who were not trying to climb

up the sides of the steamer or scale the warehouse wall were massed, clawing and screeching, at the gate.

Suddenly the Cockney was aware of another human at his side. He turned to look into the tense face of Scar Cheek. The three long gashes pulsed blood red under his emotion.

"The hose!" the latter snapped. "Get it turned on! Quick!"

The Cockney only stared at him without comprehension.

"The fire hose, you fool! That's the only thing will hold down the big cats. Don't stand there gawping like a clown! Jump to it!"

A faint flush of indignation began to seep through the ex-soldier's confusion at this brusque ordering by a down-and-outer who but a little while ago had been subservient.

"Blimey!" he grumbled. "Yer knows a 'ell of a lot about 'em all of a sudden, don't yer? 'Oo the bloomin' 'ell—"

His complaint choked in his throat at the sudden hot flare in Scar Cheek's face. But the man's voice came just as suddenly mild, almost shame-faced.

"Yeah, I—I've seen 'em before now. Get the hose on. Nothing like solid water to back 'em into a corner. And then we'll rush him with nets, canvas, blankets, whatever you've got."

The thing sounded like sense, however desperate. The soldier ran to obey.

Scar Cheek rushed at a mob of cage attendants, banged their heads together, hustled them, cursed them into shoving outlying, scattered cages and crates together to make a narrow corner against the warehouse wall.

The lithe black form skulked amongst other cages, making its way toward the gate, jammed with yelping natives, who trampled indiscriminately upon women and children and each other. Its short respite of concealment had been sufficient to show it that there lay the only low spot.

The soldier was again at Scar Cheek's side. No shiny brass hose nozzle was in his hands. But a shotgun.

"It's locked up," he panted from much useless running. "Locked in the bloody toolhouse. We'll 'ave ter shoot it."

Scar Cheek sprang at him.

"You blasted fool! You can't do that! That's a hell of a valuable animal!"

The Cockney dodged away. "Bloody fool yerself. That devil'll murder—There 'e goes! 'Hout o' me way, crazy Yank! I'll get 'im!"

Scar Cheek rushed and wrestled him. It was brief. With one ferocious jerk he wrestled the shotgun free; with a shove of his open hand across the other's face he sent him staggering. Nothing subservient about him now.

"Damned idiot! That beast's worth a mint! You heard what the professor said!"

The soldier rushed in again, clutching for the gun, yammering.

Scar Cheek stepped aside and flung the weapon from him. It struck the side of the steamer and fell between it and the dock.

"Gaw lumme! Now yer done it!" The soldier stood aghast. "Now that black devil'll slaughter—"

"Come on!" roared Scar Cheek, "Rush him! All of us together!"

HE SNATCHED up a stout tarpaulin and ran in the direction where the lithe black form had last slunk between the cages.

But alone. If the soldier was aghast, the attendants were paralyzed.

Scar Cheek's run dropped to a crouch. Warily, on tense toes, he advanced, holding the tarpaulin spread before him as a screen. Its ends trailed on either side.

"Look out!" yelled the Cockney. " 'E's be'ind that empty crate!"

In the same moment, with a short coughing snarl, a black bolt launched itself, like out of a cannon, at the man

who had the crazy hardihood to come too close.

White teeth agape, yellow chisel claws at their full six-inch spread! A hundred and forty pounds of hate and demoniac temper!

Scar Cheek threw up the tarpaulin before his face. The beast hit it full in the center. The impact flung both of them rolling on the dock floor.

Over and over, and still over again. The man's one hope was to envelop the beast in the heavy canvas, to smother the lashing paws. He rolled, therefore, his hands clutching at billowing folds, his legs kicking flying ends under.

But lightning black paws found openings. Yellow claws raked the air.

The yelping of the huddled populace stilled. Hands were held over mouths in the Malay attitude of astonishment, round eyes stared at the whirl of canvas and dust and fine wood splinters.

The only sounds now were the thudding of bodies, the muffled roars of the beast, and the straining grunts of the man.

A flashing paw raked the man's hip. It ripped the pants clear out from waist to knee. In an instant the white duck material was flooded with red. Involuntarily the man yelled.

He rolled again, and over again. An empty crate stood on its side. The twirling mass thudded against it. The man yelled again, this time in triumph.

Somehow he shoved the heavy canvas into the open side. Somehow he fought clear of the folds. He dragged the crate down over them and heaved his weight on top.

"Come ahead!" he shouted. "Come on! All of you! Hold it down!"

The Cockney was the first to recover himself. He came running and flung himself on top of the crate. Other attendants came more slowly and added their weight.

"Blimey!" The Cockney panted. "Strike me if ever I saw the likes o't. Strewth, but yer done a job there, Yank. Crazy ye are; but 'oo the 'ell are yer?"

Scar Cheek only snapped orders at him.

"Rush me an empty, here. Quick. Jump, you blasted fool!" He roared as the soldier gaped hesitantly at him. "How long d'you think we can hold this devil in this foolish crate?"

The Sergeant jumped. Scar Cheek's fury transmitted itself through him to the coolies. The empty cage arrived at a run.

"An axe!" Scar Cheek snapped. In a frenzy of impatience he pushed jabbering coolies aside; single handed he heaved the cage around, so that the sliding door end faced the crate. Between them he left a scant eighteen inches of working space. He swept menacing eyes over the crowd, growling:

"Stand by, the gang, to shove this cage hard up when I give the word. And instantly, else there'll be hell. Mine as well as this black devil's."

With incredible insanity he stood between cage and crate and chopped at a plank. The ex-sergeant clutched his arm.

"Gaw—Gawd!" he babbled. "Gawd blimey, Yank. Is it crazy ye are again?"

Scar Cheek shoved him aside. "Crazy yourself, Limey. This silly crate wouldn't hold fifteen minutes. And if he got loose again some scary fool would shoot him for sure. This is a beautiful and a valuable beast. Ready on that cage!"

He knocked a short section of plank in. Within the dimness the black demon snarled and screamed. Scar Cheek held the axe to the hole. He flashed a look over his shoulder.

"Ready, all you gibbering monkeys? Shove her in, then! Hard! And hold it so!"

He sprang from between. The cage slammed up against the crate. Scar Cheek thundered upon it with his axe.

Like a devil from the pit, roaring, all teeth and claws ready for murder, the black shape hurled itself through the

hole into the cage. Scar Cheek yelled and slammed the sliding door shut.

For tense seconds the snarling and spitting of the black panther were the only sounds. Then slowly, as pent breaths began to let go, commenced the babble of men.

Scar Cheek drew in a huge breath himself. His scars throbbed in red pulse.

"A very beautiful and a valuable beast," he said. "He's safe enough now." The he looked at his gashed hip, from which blood streamed.

"Telephone your professor," he ordered. "Get him down here to look after things. I got to go get patched up; these things turn to blood poison."

He limped from the dock. A trail of blood spots was the only identification he left.

THE professor arrived, a tornado of haste and perspiring perturbation.

"Where iss he?" he boomed. "He iss not hurt, you said? He iss safe? *Ach Gott!* What a very near calamity! Let me see him. He is caged again, und comfortable? Goot. A splendid piece of work. I would not believe it could be done. Show me. Myself I must see that he iss not hurt; my beautiful *pardus melas.*"

"Ho? Your *pardus melas*?" The soldier shrugged indignation. "It's the blawsted cats yer're thinkin' of? I almost thought yer were maybe worryin' about the man."

"*Ach, ya,* der man. A goot man he must be."

"S'welp me Gawd, a whole man, like I never seen the like."

"Yess, yess, of course. Schure, a man like I did not know there was another one. Three of them there are in der world. I know them all. He must be found, this man. Such a man iss worth —iss worth—" His brow clouded over. "He left no name? How, then, shall he be found?"

"Strewth," said the sergeant. "That ort to be easy enough. 'E's got a face like a hangry lion; an' e's got a bunch o' scars acrost it like 'e'd fought with one."

"Scars? His face all clawed up? *Himmel!*" The professor caught at the sergeant's arm. "Three red slashes across his cheek? A miracle! It can be no other! Col-lossa-a-al! He said he would go away, into der jungles to live with der cats until he should get his nerves back. But that, I did not believe would be possible, once der nerves iss torn by der cats. *Gott!* What a training he must have lived through! In der drug store he must be yet. Gome quick."

The professor's voice reached the drug store before he did. "Steve!" he was bellowing as he propelled his ponderous frame forward. "Steve! I see you not; but I know you already by der doings you have done."

Scar Cheek's scars were white across his face and he bit on his lip in the emergency room of the drug store as the pharmacist stitched and bandaged.

"*Himmel!*" The professor's bulk heaved to a standstill. "That iss a bad mauling, Steve." He swept the pharmacist aside as a hindrance. "Out of der way, clumsy you. Let me. I know these things. Steve, old friend, this iss not so goot."

"Just a touch," said Steve through his teeth. "I've had worse; and I guess I'll have worse again."

"Schure." The professor was in hearty agreement. "Schure you will. It iss der second claw, of course, iss der worst. *Aie,* that went deep. But *Gott* iss goot to my beautiful *pardus melas.* Steve, I have not money enough to offer you what you are worth. But because you love der beautiful cats I know you will gome with me."

Steve grinned as he winced.

"Sure is a beautiful pair of babies. And you think they're a separate breed? Gosh, Professor, we'll have to handle 'em with kid gloves so they don't come to any hurt."

CAN ROLLER

By FOSTER-HARRIS

THEY said she was Apache. Mescalero breed, a white father, red mother. Maybe that was wrong.

At least she was Indian and very old. No doubt at all about that. She sat cross-legged, blanketed, with her little stock of piñon nuts before her. And if the strange, new life of Cucharita interested her, she gave no sign.

Occasionally she sold somebody a nickel's worth of piñones.

That was how she made her living. How she had gotten her name. She had a real name, of course, a clacking, Indian something. Everybody who knew her called her Mother Piñones, saying it the way the Mexican street venders wail out their cry.

"Peen-yoooon-neez!" Like that.

She had been selling the pea-size, smoky-tasting little nuts in Cucharita ever since the oldest cowman could remember. Perhaps she had sold them to Billy the Kid, Pat Garrett, to many another flaming figure of New Mexico's past. She could have.

Now she dealt with a strange, hard, new breed—oil boom followers—drillers, roughnecks, pipe-liners, tankies, cold-eyed gunmen, gamblers. The whole, human panorama of the flush oil camps. Cucharita, New Mexico, tough little cowtown of the old days, now had a booming field.

And in some ways the new version of being tough could have given the old

one of early days aces and spades.

Business was dull this morning. The wind was cold. People went quickly by, paying the old woman no attention. Presently a soft, drawling voice spoke to her.

"How they goin', mother?"

She looked up with a quick-wrinkled smile. She like Ross Hilliard, young deputy sheriff who rode herd on this town.

"Not so good, my son," she answered, in the surprisingly excellent English she could use when she wanted to. "Your boom friends seem to have gone back on the old lady."

Hilliard grinned. "Not my friends," he disclaimed. "Leastways, not all of 'em, thank gosh." He dug into a pocket, produced a dime.

"Might as well fix me up for the day, hadn't you? Here, just put 'em in my pocket."

With a cup Mother Piñones dipped nuts from her coffee-can stock. Ross Hilliard lifted a mildly protesting hand.

"Whoa! That's a plenty." He squatted beside her, cracking the papery shells with brown fingers, flipping the nuts expertly into his mouth.

Abruptly, he stiffened. From the place across the street, Big George's, had come the muffled sound of a shot, then another, another and a wild yell.

Something funny about that yell. It sounded more applauding than terrified, or enraged. An admiring acclaim it was.

Before the young deputy could straighten, the shuttered doors of Big George's burst open. Something small came hurtling out—a tomato can. It struck on the edge of the board sidewalk. Before it could roll off, the gun barked again. As though with life of its own, the can leaped into the air, splashed down into the street.

Eyes suddenly hard, frosty, Ross Hilliard jerked to his feet. With a whistling whine, the big bullet had ricocheted right over their heads—close. The doors of Big George's were spilling laughing, yelling, drunken men.

Leading them was a giant whose hands seemed filled with leaping, living flame.

White and orange, those flames flashed in the chill sunlight. The glitter of nickeled, whirling .45's. The blaze and roar of powder. The giant was shooting at the can, making it bound and roll, never still an instant, lead hitting it every shot. Amazing shooting; and lightning fast.

Along the walk, this side, in front of the stores, men were diving enthusiastically for cover. A great, loaded oilfield truck was coming up the street. A ricochet spanged into it and the driver popped down like a prairie dog into its hole.

Boiling, Deputy Ross Hilliard started forward. He did not run, but he moved plenty fast. Behind him the Indian woman sat quietly.

She had not moved a muscle. Her wrinkled, leathery face was absolutely wooden. But her eyes watched.

The giant stopped shooting. A loose grin on his big, red face, he turned. His admiring, cursing sycophants frothed about him. The big guns spun suddenly in his hands, glittering wheels, one going one way, one the other—the fancy roll.

Abruptly he stopped them, the weapons hanging from his fingers thrust through the trigger guards. His bloodshot eyes looked at the deputy. A three days' growth of red beard covered his jowls, growing in thicker patches here and there, making his face look as though it were diseased, peeling.

His voice was contemptuous, challenging.

"Oh, you? The boy deputy, huh? Well, what do you want?"

Ross looked at him. The giant had been drinking, but he wasn't drunk. Just a born trouble-maker, an animal with too much money, too much power, physical and otherwise.

"I've told you before, Corb," he said

coldly, crisply. "No shooting in this town. You're under arrest. Give me those guns."

The giant winked at his companions.

"You hear that, boys? The kid wonder's arresting me. Gonna take my guns right off of me, he is—maybe."

Somebody laughed.

Despite himself, Hilliard flushed slightly. He was very young and this was his first badge-wearing job. Nevertheless his eyes remained steady, impassive, chill.

The giant lifted his guns, still dangling from his index fingers. "Watch this, boys," he invited. Then, to Hilliard: "Here they are, Buddy."

Hilliard did not move. He knew exactly what the giant intended. More showoff stuff. Stale. But his own gun still was in its holster, under his coat. Almost twice his size, Corb was not only more powerful, he was irresponsible, deadly dangerous.

A mocking guffaw started up out of Corb's throat. Started—it never got clear out—before it could young Ross Hilliard had acted with the sudden violence of a stick of dynamite.

A brown blur, his hand shot out, stripping one of the pistols off the gunman's finger. But it didn't stop there. In a straight, smoking smash it drove the heavy butt of the weapon straight up, against the point of the thick jaw with a cracking thud. Before the horrified giant even knew what had hit him, the barrel of the gun crashed him over the ear completely eliminating his remaining, immediate interest, if any, in the matter.

Ripping the other gun from its limp hand, Hilliard stepped back, letting the unconscious giant sag to the walk. He flicked an inquiring gaze over the faces about him. With their expectant grins, their frozen, staring eyes, gaping mouths, they looked ridiculous. It had happened so quickly.

He said nothing. Stuffing the fancy six-shooters into the pocket of his coat, he knelt slowly. The silence was complete, stunned.

Corb was out cold. With a heave Hilliard gathered him up, working a shoulder under the great bulk, straightening. It was only then that one of the awed bystanders spoke.

"He—he'll get you for this." The fellow, a blur-faced rat, was blustering. "He'll get you—"

"You think so?" Hilliard *looked* at him. The fellow was brave enough to stand. But confusion, fear flickered in his eyes and he did not answer.

Just the same, as Hilliard turned away, starting toward the tiny jail with his prisoner, he knew there was at least a possibility in what the man had said.

Red Corb was a power in this county. By some trick he'd picked up a cream lease just before the drills proved it enormously valuable. He'd sold it for plenty.

He had other oil money coming in. He was a big shot in the strange, bewildering new underworld the oil boom had brought in. An underworld of crimes and criminals that Cucharita in the old days, tough as it was, had never even heard of. And his money and brutal, fighting ability gave him stout strings in local politics.

Hilliard was not at all afraid of him in a straight, stand-up and trigger gunfight although he knew Corb, for all his showoff mania, was deadly fast, with a certain brute courage, and would kill.

But he did remember other things often happened to men who got in Corb's way. Highly unpleasant things, many of them. So he just wondered.

He dumped his still unconscious prisoner in the carcel, locked the door and went after a bucket of water, to bring him to.

ABOUT that time Mother Piñones started to gather up her coffee-can of nuts and get up. She was a little awkward about it. She held her left arm stiffly

against her withered breast. There was a wet stain on the dark calico of her dress where she had been pressing the material against her wrist.

She'd sat there quietly during the whole affair. Her face hadn't changed a particle, didn't change now. But that ricochet slug Hilliard had thought passed over their heads hadn't.

Instead it had struck the old woman's bony wrist, burned along her forearm. Not much of a wound. Just a gash, but it was bleeding; and it had smashed a hellish lot of pain into the joint.

So much pain, in fact, that Mother Piñones was sick, faint. She knew she must get to her hogan, far back up in the ridges, do something about it.

Instead, she sank back down, staring with unblinking woodenness into space. Two of the defeated gunman's followers, the blear-faced fellow and another, had come over toward her. Stopped at the edge of the board sidewalk, they were talking in low, excited voices. And she could hear.

"You call up Jimmy Daniels, let him know about this," the blear-faced one was saying with swift vehemence.

"Right away. Tell him he better git over here. That damn, grandstandin' little skunk, he's mebbe killed Corb—"

"Not by just hittin' him on the head, he ain't." The other man laughed shortly.

"Pistol-whippin' Red Corb, with his own gun! Whew! He'll be boilin' poison! Maybe I better call Jimmy, tell him if he don't want a deputy killed he better fire the—"

He broke off abruptly, knifing a glance at the old woman out of the corner of his tiny eyes. Mother Piñones did not appear to be looking. But she saw it. She even heard his suspicious whisper.

"You reckon she heard?"

"Hell, no. And if she did—" The blurry-faced man swung around toward her, his sudden smile paper thin.

"Say, squaw! What you sell them peanuts for? You hear?"

Stolidly, Mother Piñones glanced at him, looked away.

"No spik Inglis," she grunted, after a moment. *"Pee-yoon-neez?"*

"You see?" The blur-faced man swung back, satisfied. Still talking, the two moved away.

Mother Piñones sat still. The two were part of the recent influx of oilfield scum, as was Red Corb. Not a man of them had been in the county more than three or four months.

The working members of the oil invasion, the drillers, tankies, roughnecks and such Mother Piñones mostly liked. But the parasites who had come with them, filth of the world—

She pressed a fold of her dress tightly against her arm. Jimmy Daniels, she knew, was the weak sheriff, over at Reynosa, the county seat. And from what the two had said—

She did not know everything about the hidden "connections" of this new Cucharita, the fixings and gravy and other reasons why such men as Red Corb got away with it. But she did know more than you'd expect. With sharp ears and a wooden Indian face you can learn a great deal.

After awhile she got up, still holding her arm under her blanket, and went away. She went to her hut in the piñon tree sprinkled ridges, north of the little town. There she crushed and brewed herbs to put on her arm and, doubtless, meanwhile brewed her own thoughts as well. You never can tell what an Indian is thinking.

AN HOUR later Deputy Ross Hilliard had his first portent of what was coming when Red Corb was turned loose after a farce of a hearing and hurried away, frothing, by several of his henchmen. The next morning he got the works.

Sheriff Jim Daniels had called him in, over to the dilapidated courthouse in Reynosa. Frowning, squirming in his

chair, refusing to meet Hilliard's eyes, Daniels eventually came to the point.

"I reckon I'm gonna have to move you outa Cucharita, Ross. You ain't gettin' along. Maybe you're too young or something. Not the right man—"

"And if I think different?" Ross Hilliard was soft, but icily edged. His eyes had narrowed.

The sheriff flared. He was looking for an excuse.

"I reckon you'll do what I tell you and like it. No matter what yuh think. You ain't goin' back."

Young Hilliard stood up with a jerk. Something clinked down on the desk from his hand. His badge. His eyes were very grim.

"That's what you really want, isn't it, Sheriff?" Despite his effort, his voice was a little harsh, bitter. "There it is.

"If you want me, you know where you can find me."

He swung stiffly, not looking back. As he opened the door, the sheriff started to speak, then dropped back into his chair without a sound. Lips twisting, he looked at the badge.

He was a weak sister, the sheriff; and dangerous only as a coward is dangerous, when he was afraid. But sometimes a coward can be more deadly than the boldest man of courage.

Driving back to Cucharita, Ross Hilliard let his blazing anger burn down to hard coals. He knew why he had been let out.

Red Corb and his kind, running the town, wanted a Law who would go along. Hilliard not only hadn't gone along. He'd climaxed his brief tenure by putting on Corb the worst humiliation a gunman could suffer; buffaloing him with his own gun.

Perhaps he shouldn't have done it. But even yet he could see no other course he might honorably have taken. Corb had been flatly defying the law, asking for trouble. And those guns; the giant might claim they were empty, but Hilliard had known they weren't.

He'd counted the shots and afterward had found one still loaded shell in each gun. Dangling from his fingers that way, with a lightning snap of the wrists Corb could have rolled the guns into his hands, pulled trigger. It was a trick so old it had whiskers.

Perhaps Corb would not have killed a deputy. Shooting an officer in performance of his duty would have kicked up much more stink than the mere shooting of a private individual. But Red Corb already had done that.

Just before Hilliard had been made a deputy and sent over, Corb had shot down his first man in Cucharita and had got clean away with it. He'd pleaded self-defense. But long green grease and tugging strings in the right places undoubtedly had had plenty to do with it.

Ross Hilliard had tried to work with the decent element of the town. There was such an element and in the majority, too, although sticking to the background, quiet. Storekeepers, busy oil executives, the few oldtimers left. Cucharita never had been an incorporated town. But it soon would be.

Given time, the decent element would make Cucharita just what 99 out of a hundred oil-boom towns that live become. A peaceful, law-abiding place to live. Ross Hilliard proposed going along with them.

With his reasons, he was staying in town. He was pretty sure he could get a job. And, shortly, Cucharita would be needing a city marshal; or perhaps they would put on the dog and call it police chief.

As he neared the straggling outskirts a scarlet truck slipped by him on feathery springs. "Nitroglycerin—Danger," its black signs said. The driver solemnly lifted a big hand, thumbing his nose with equal gravity. Ross thumbed back.

He liked Cloudy Carter. The big shooter had a station a mile north of town, against the base of the first high foothills. There he manufactured his hideously potent "soup" for shooting

wells. Owlishly, he had assured Hilliard that, with what he had left over, he just mixed a little strychnine for taste and sold it to the local liquid purveyors.

Considering the effects of some of the alleged whiskey sold in the field, Ross didn't know that he might not be telling the truth.

He drove on, stopping in front of the carcel, going into the pint-measure office to get his effects. Being young, he felt very bitter about it, disgusted. As he came out, arms loaded, Bill Behr spoke to him.

Bill Behr was a rotund little man who ran Behr's Bargain Emporium. A good egg, and Ross liked him.

"Mornin', Sheriff."

Hilliard smiled wryly. "Not any more," he said, glancing down at his burdens. Bill Behr's mouth formed a round, indignant, understanding O.

"You—uh—leavin' us?"

Ross shook his head.

"No," he said. "Not if I can find any other kind of job."

Bill Behr said something under his breath—something exceedingly uncomplimentary about cheap politicians, their owners and ancestry.

"Right when you got every crook in town hunting a hole. Listen; you come see me tonight. After I talk with the boys."

Bill Behr sniffed. "If we can't do anything else we can form a merchants' association, hire our own officer. We'll find out who owns this town."

The gauntlet from the other side arrived shortly after noon, delivered personally by the giant, Corb.

Ross had stopped to pass the time of day with Mother Piñones, huddled in her blanket at her usual stand. Today she had her stock in a big lard bucket, with a bail. From the dumps behind some store or cafe she had salvaged several other containers, coffee cans, a greasy syrup can and a wrecked spade and these lay beside her. Buying a nickel's worth of piñones, Hilliard did not notice that her left arm did not come from under the blanket at all.

Cloudy Carter, the shooter, drifted by, stopped to commiserate Ross sardonically and offered him a job. Grinning, Ross refused.

"Driving a soup wagon? No, thanks. Getting buried all full of bullet holes is bad enough. Without bein' just a hole left to bury."

"It's a lot less expensive," Cloudy pointed out. His boot toe touched one of Mother Piñones' salvaged cans and he glanced down.

"Grandma, here, was about to find out about it the other day," he confided. "Walkin' off with an old soup can off my dump when I caught her. Even one of those empties—"

He broke off with a quick breath, turning. "Here comes your funeral now," he said and, though his words still were light, his tone was deadly serious.

Unbuttoning his coat, Hilliard turned. Red Corb was coming up the sidewalk toward him. Ten paces behind the giant a dozen toadies trailed after. With fearful significance, they stayed right and left, leaving a wide, cleared space behind their champion.

Two lengths away the giant halted. The noises of the boom town seemed suddenly to fade away from Ross Hilliard's ears. In a dead, crystal stillness he could even hear the gunman's rasping breath.

Abstractedly, he noticed that Corb's right wrist was bandaged. He wondered if it were a trick. Corb could shoot almost as well with his left hand as his right. Probably it wasn't.

The giant didn't seem to be thinking of any tricks now. His eyes were a bright red. Spots of saliva clung to the reddish, scraggly stubble on his jaws. He looked like a maniac. Probably he was one, crazed with hate and lost face.

"You back in town?" he said in a thick gabble. "You back— You back—"

Hilliard looked at him. Yesterday,

when he had faced this giant, he had felt a little afraid, a little uncertain, desperate. Today the situation was reversed.

Today he felt cool, sure, completely the master. Even though Corb, in this state, was infinitely more dangerous, today Ross Hilliard held what yesterday Red Corb had possessed. Corb knew it. And not only Corb; the whole town knew.

"Go on about your business, Corb," he said evenly. "I don't care to talk to you."

A little froth of saliva appeared at the corners of the giant's mouth. "You ain't a Law now. You ain't a Law." He seemed to cling to the thought, repeating it again.

Abruptly, he lifted his bandaged wrist.

"If you're in town when this gets well, I'm going to kill you. You get out of town, damn you. You get—"

Cloudy Carter snickered. For just an instant Ross Hilliard thought the flick of it would start the maddened giant for a gun regardless. And he did not want to kill him. Swiftly, he interposed.

"All right, Corb. Get your hand well. Then if you still feel that way—why, I'll still be around."

He turned half away, curtly stopping any further parley. It was nowhere near as reckless a gesture as it seemed. He could hear the giant's breathing; and Cloudy Carter's face was a mirror.

Anyway, Corb was not going to try conclusions. Not this time.

There was a shuffling noise. By the little, contemptuous puckering at the corners of Cloudy's eyes, Hilliard knew the giant had turned and was stumbling away. He reached casually into his pocket, taking out some piñones, starting to crack them.

"Yellow," murmured Carter. "Like all them grandstanders. But, by God, at that I wouldn't of turned my back on him."

"Didn't turn it very far." Ross grinned. "But didn't you hear him? He's gonna let me live till his wrist gets well."

"Ain't nothin' the matter with that wrist, I don't think." Cloudy's lips twisted. "Alibi. Says he sprained it when he fell. You just got him buffaloed, kid. That's all."

Hilliard did not answer. He did not entirely share Carter's contemptuous dismissal of the giant. Nor did the Indian woman, apparently, for after a moment she spoke up.

"Bad man," she grunted, her face wooden. "Very bad man."

"You think so, do yuh?" inquired Cloudy. Mother Piñones had no more to say.

CURIOUSLY, as he stood up in the citizens' meeting that evening, the old lady's words were what Ross was thinking about.

It was a strictly private meeting, in the back room of Bill Behr's store. Old Dr. Shartel was there, Frank Carmen, Jeff Baker, who owned the City Drugstore; Tom Bridges, the Magnus Oil Corporation field superintendent. A dozen others. All solid citizens.

They had not messed around about it.

"Going to take us some time, Ross, to get a city government organized," Baker had said. "We aim to leave the crooks out; and that'll take some fancy planning.

"But if you'll string along with us, we'll make it worth your while. You've got this town under your thumb and you're square. That's the kind of John Law we want.

"Until we do get organized we want you to keep right on, say, as special officer for the merchants' association. We'll probably have a row with the sheriff about it and you maybe won't have much official status. May be kind of difficult for you. But—well—"

Baker had stopped, looking at him appealingly.

"I get what you mean." Ross nodded, standing up. Somehow their concentrated gaze, which yesterday would have embarrassed him, tonight didn't trouble at all.

Overnight a mantle of calm certainty had dropped over his shoulders. He had passed out of his youth. He didn't quite realize it yet, but he had.

"You got to use a kind of unofficial officer to ride herd on this town until you can make him the real article, that it?"

Baker nodded. Hilliard was thinking of what Mother Piñones had said about Red Corb.

"A very bad man." Underworld leader, trickster, grandstander; and despite popular opinion otherwise, grandstanders can be the most dangerous of all customers.

By their very nature they have an insatiable, morbid craving for public plaudits, esteem. Do something to take that away from them and it may be like taking his drug from a dope fiend.

As front man for the local underworld, Red Corb epitomized the forces against whom these sober citizens proposed to pit him. And Red Corb had been powerful enough to get him fired.

Even a badge handed out by a crooked sheriff radiates its authority, prestige. This way there would be no such protection.

On the contrary! "Kind of difficult," said it, all right.

But he had something different from a tin badge now, something better.

"I'm no two-gun terror and don't aim to be," he said slowly.

"Reckon you know that, though. All right, if you want me, I'll try."

He got his first samples of just how difficult it was going to be early the next afternoon. Bill Behr and Frank Carmen, as a committee for the brand-new Cucharita Merchants' Association, had driven over to interview the sheriff and county commissioners.

They returned now, bristling, to report.

"He said he wouldn't recognize us and he damn sure wouldn't give you any special commission," Carmen told Hilliard. "Said you were a trouble maker.

"Don't worry; we'll build a fire under him. We're going to see the Governor."

A half hour later the new deputy, a saturnine individual named Boyd Nichols, issued his warning.

"You ain't a Law now and just don't forget it," he said coldly. "I'm gonna keep my eye on you. You start anything—" Portentously, he left the sentence unfinished.

Ross gave him a thin, sweet smile.

"All right, Sheriff," he agreed. "But you may have a time keeping that eye on me. I don't chum with the crooks."

Deputy Nichols thought that over, got it, frowned angrily, started to open his mouth—and changed his mind. After all, he thought, even a grateful gangster can't pay off a dead deputy.

It was mid-morning of the next day when Cloudy Carter filed his further report. Grinning, he met Ross on the street.

"Say, I drove by your Red pal's place this morning," he informed. "Big boy was out in the yard, shore a-practisin' up for you. Got every can, fence post and everything else around the place shot as full of holes as a sieve. And he was usin' his right hand. Looks like in the next two, three days he'll shore be ready to come in for the big barbecue."

Hilliard smiled placidly. He knew all about Corb's practising. Perhaps the gunman had a new motive now, but as far as the powder burning went he had been doing that for months, possibly years.

At the former ranch house the sullen giant had purchased, west of town, everything in sight was liberally peppered with bullet holes. Inordinately proud of his ability to do the double roll, to fan with either hand, to offer every

fancy trick in the six-gun category, Red Corb spent hours daily perfecting his technique.

Doubtless he was the fastest, fanciest sixshooter specialist in the West. Hilliard wasn't worried about that. Or at least not much. He was worried over what might happen should be find it necessary to kill Corb. As yet he was entirely without official status. The panicky sheriff and county commissioners might find such a killing the very excuse they needed.

Covering themselves, they might railroad Ross Hilliard to the chair; and perhaps smash this effort at honest government in Cucharita a-borning. It was something to think about.

Cloudy did not expect the giant to do anything. But Hilliard wondered. And he was a little grim-faced when Frank Carmen came to him with a different slant.

"Ive been hearing rumors," Carmen said curtly. "I just wanted to tell you, if they do rib Corb up to it, why you're our man. We'll back you afterward with all we've got. Lawyers, everything."

"Meaning?" said Hilliard, very softly.

"Meaning—" Carmen bit his lip. "But anything you do will be all right. We're not telling you, man."

No, they weren't telling him. But they had asked him and he had accepted. He had to see it out, be the champion; or maybe the goat.

Perhaps Corb, after all, would not dare. And if he didn't, nobody else in town would. Intuitively, Ross knew he held the whip hand now though he'd better not kill Corb if only, honorably, he could keep from it.

As he bought a dime's worth of nuts from Mother Piñones, the old woman asked a peculiar question.

"You roll cans?" Her right hand made a motion as though firing a revolver.

Ross shook his head. "Never went in for that kind of stuff. Why?"

The old woman sat passive for a long moment.

"It takes good shooting," she said at last. "I think maybe, when he gets drunk enough he will come in."

But possibly Mr. Corb was not drunk enough that afternoon or evening. At least he did not come in.

About seven-thirty the next morning Frank Carmen furnished a possible reason why. Tight-mouthed, he drew Hilliard aside.

"Jimmy Daniels sneaked over here last night, Ross," he informed, low voiced. "Slipped out to Corb's place and was there three hours.

"I guess that means there'll be fireworks today. If there's anything you want us to do—gang Corb and grab him when he tries to start it, say—"

Hilliard shook his head.

"Nev' mind," he grunted. "Don't reckon—that'd be quite the thing to do.

"Well, anyway, there'll be plenty of us around for your witnesses," said Carmen.

FIFTEEN or twenty minutes later Deputy Nichols came by and took post on the corner, some dozen paces away. He watched Hilliard out of the oblique corners of cold, screened eyes; and Hilliard wondered just what instructions Sheriff Daniels had given him.

He could guéss, of course. Brother Nichols already had handed him somewhat more than a hint. Though just how brazen a play the deputy would make was yet to be seen. Probably he wouldn't do more than arrest Hilliard; but he might. He was Corb's man.

A scarlet truck came slicing around the corner. It stopped and Cloudy Carter, the shooter, dropped out and strode toward him. Cloudy was frowning angrily.

"Say, listen, Chief," he addressed Ross. "I got a case for the law. Somethin' for you to look into. Some damn—"

"If it's for the law, you better tell him," Hilliard interrupted quietly. He turned, gesturing toward the eavesdropping deputy.

"He's the John Law here now, you know."

There was no real mockery in his tone. But perhaps the suspicious deputy thought there was, for he swung, bristling, to meet the cold critical stare of Cloudy Carter.

"Him?" The shooter made an unwritable yet universally familiar noise through pursed lips. Calmly ignoring the effect on the deputy, he continued to stare as though inspecting some kind of quite objectionable monkey.

"Oh well, nev' mind. Take care of it myself. I think I know—

"Damn it!" He swung, hurriedly paddling back to his truck, to get it out of the way of an oncoming behemoth loaded with rig timbers. Waving his hand, he drove on.

Hardly five minutes later, as Ross was talking to Bill Behr, there came a single, flat, dead thump! More like a gigantic board striking flatside against the earth, than anything else. Far away, but powerful, the sound, through the air, was more like a direct, slugging blow than a noise.

"What the heck!" Behr had whirled and was staring. Hilliard too had spun. For the first time he was realizing how much on edge, taut-nerved he was this morning. The least little thing—

There was nothing to be seen and the sound might have come from any direction. Behr shrugged fatalistically.

"Boiler explosion, I'll bet. We'll soon learn."

"Or Cloudy Carter." Hilliard winced. "Man, I—I hope not."

Loungers down the way were stepping out in the street, craning their necks interestedly. As he twisted to look with them, Ross noticed Mother Piñones in her accustomed place, and the thought came to him that there was the difference between the white and the Indian.

Mother Piñones alone was not curious, not trying to see. Apathetic, she sat just as always, a mummy in a blanket, unmoving, looking at nothing.

The blast had not involved Cloudy Carter. Five minutes later Hilliard saw him, on foot, a block away, darting into a gathering crowd. With an excited grunt, Bill Behr caught at his arm.

"There's our news," he snapped. "Come on, fella."

They went toward the crowd. The new deputy already was there, cursing, shoving his way in. Significantly, they made a way for Hilliard, so that he came immediately, face to face with the whimpering, jerking man within the tight circle.

The fellow was one of the loafers who hung around Big George's place. He had been one of the claque trailing after Red Corb. His clothes were torn. There was blood on his face. He shook and twitched as though badly shell-shocked and the words blubbered out of his mouth, almost unintelligible.

"It blowed him up, I tell you," he kept saying. "It blowed him all to hell."

Hilliard laid a steadying hand on his shoulder. "Blowed who, man? Take it easy, tell me."

"Red Corb." The fellow's voice was almost a shriek. "He—he stepped out in the yard. They was a can layin' over't one side, old syrup can, looked like. He taken a shot at it and it just blowed him all to hell, I tell you. I seen it—"

Hilliard glanced over his shoulder. Hard behind him Bill Behr was staring. Behr's mouth, his eyes were round, incredulous "o's."

"Let's get out of here, boy," he muttered suddenly, in Hilliard's ear. "Let's get."

Slowly, Ross yielded to his tugging hand. As they came out of the crowd, Behr looked at him, licking his lips.

"Nitro," Behr murmured. "Blowed up when he hit it. Nitro, sure.

"We better find Cloudy Carter." He

grinned dryly. "Because somebody's sure beat you to eliminating this town's chief drawback."

AT THAT particular moment, up the street, Mr. Cloudy Carter was bending over old Mother Piñones. A very peculiar expression was on his face and he was holding his voice to a whisper.

"Say, listen," Mr. Carter inquired with great earnestness. "Was it you swiped that soup out at my place last night? Was it?"

Under her blanket the old Indian woman hugged her left arm. She did not even look up, and her face was as vivacious as the flat side of a plank.

"No sabe," grunted Mother Piñones. *"Peen-yoon-neez?"*

TREASURE SHIP

UNDER the spur of gold the wreck of the *Islander* has been raised from 365 feet of water thirty-three years after what the *Daily Alaska Dispatch* properly headlined as the "Greatest Catastrophe in the Annals of Alaskan Steamship Navigation." Seventy-two of the hundred and twenty-four on board were drowned when she struck an iceberg in Stephens Pass near Juneau on August 15, 1901.

The *Islander* was bound for Seattle with a hundred and seven returning Klondikers as passengers. When she sailed their pokes of gold were in the ship's safe, popular belief placing the amount at two million dollars, which at today's prices would be worth three million dollars.

The Curtis Wiley Salvage Company finally undertook the task with new and special apparatus consisting of diving-bells equipped with steel "hands." After many disappointments and failures in two years of effort, the *Islander* finally was cradled in slings of steel cable stretched between two salvage vessels and brought to the surface within a few days of the thirty-third anniversary of her sinking. And then, while she was being moved into shallow water the bow dropped off into the depths!

In the recovered part of the barnacled hull some gold was found—how much the salvors will not say. There, too, were the skeletons of many of the seventy-two drowned men. Some of the skeletons still had boots on; and beside one lay a chunk of rust that once was a revolver. But the safe supposed to contain the treasure was not there. Assuming that it is in the lost forward part of the ship, the salvors are going after that.

So far the salvage work has cost two hundred thousand dollars—and records recently uncovered indicate that the gold in the ship's safe amounts to only ten thousand dollars. Survivors are quoted as saying that the purser distributed the gold to its owners before the vessel sank. Only three pokes totalling ten thousand dollars remained in the safe, according to an obscure statement in the *Daily Alaska Dispatch* of that date.

Even if nothing like the anticipated two million dollars is recovered, the venture will be regarded as worth while because of the success in raising the *Islander* from deep water despite unprecedented hardships. It opens the way to the salvaging of other treasure ships that have been unattainable because of inadequate equipment—FOSTER DRAKE.

Canoemen of the Crimson Star

By SAMUEL ALEXANDER WHITE

(Second of Three Parts.)

SYNOPSIS

BRUCE DUNVEGAN, chief trader of the Oxford House of the Hudson's Bay Company, lifts the flap of a Cree wigwam and knows that his mission is ended. He has found Flora MacLeod, who ran away with Black Ferguson of the rival Northwest Fur Company and was deserted by him when he saw the beautiful Desirée Lazard, with whom Bruce himself is in love. On the way back to Oxford House Bruce encounters a U. S. Marshal who is looking for a man for murder. Bruce does not recognize the photograph which the marshal shows him but Flora declares it is a picture of her father, Malcolm MacLeod, as a young man.

Malcolm MacLeod, factor of Oxford House, is known to the Indians for good reason as Stern Father. He decrees that Flora's baby shall be baptized a MacLeod. The simple ceremony is conducted swiftly by Father Brochet, the only interruption being some nonsense uttered by Gaspard Follet, the fool of the trading post. When it is over Bruce again declares his love to Desirée, but she, whose father had been a French Heart, or Northwest man, says she can never love a man of the H.B.C.

Bruce has a chance to work off his bitterness when Gaspard, the idiot, tells of a Northwest man in a near-by cabin. There he finds Black Ferguson himself, and they fight. As Ferguson is about to be beaten he cries for aid and the H.B.C. men find themselves ambushed. They escape after a running fight.

Bruce then sets about his task of building a fort at Kamattawa to rival Fort La Roche of the Northwest Com-

pany. Scarcely is it finished when the north wind blows winter down from the arctic circle. When the storm has finished Maskwa, the fleet-footed and untiring Ojibway fort runner, springs over the snow on his webbed shoes with news which Bruce announces to his men.

"Half our number leave tomorrow for Oxford House. Men from the Northwest have sacked our fur trains. The Factor will go to raze Fort Dumarge. We move against Fort Brondel."

A defiant roar lifts the rafters and in an incredibly short time the dog teams are yelping down the frozen trail.

CHAPTER V

THE BRUNT OF THE BLIZZARD

"VOYEZ LES Kamattawa trains," shrieked Maurice Nicolet, the cache runner, speeding through the storm-thrashed gates of Oxford House.

"Dat so?" cried Clement Nemaire. "In dis blizzard? W'ere you be see dem, Maurice?"

" 'Cross de *lac*. W'en de snow she stop fallin' some, I see dose trains wan meenit come ovaire de trail."

"Run!" Nemaire admonished. "Tell de Factor dat, queeck."

The cache runner bolted into the trading room. MacLeod was not there. Donald Muir, the assistant trader, held charge.

"*Les* Kamattawa trains," he howled. "*M'sieu'*, dey be come ovaire de *lac*."

Bargaining ceased. Trade slipped from the men's minds. Donald Muir jumped up and squinted through the open doorway, distinguishing nothing in the swishing cloud-rifts of snow. He turned back with a shiver and jammed the latch viciously.

"Maurice, ye fule," he ridiculed. "I've na doot ye'll be seein' ghosts next. Ye dinna glint onything but a herd o' caribou driftin' before the storm."

"*Bâ oui*," persisted Nicholet, "w'en de storm she be sheeft wan leetl' bit an' de cloud break oop, I see dose trains 'cross de *lac*. *Vraiment*, dat's so." Maurice nodded his head energetically and added a string of French superlatives.

"Fetch me the glass," ordered old Donald Muir.

A man brought the glass, a long ship's telescope which Pete Connear had bestowed upon Oxford House. In spite of having seen hard service, it was a good glass, and the same lens that had picked out many a foresail upon the high seas now searched the whirling smother which enveloped the frozen surface of Oxford Lake for signs of the men from Kamattawa.

Donald Muir wedged the rattling door with his knees and sighted through the open slit, the hissing snow-eddies spitting in his beard.

"Yon's a glint o' dogs!" he exclaimed. "Noo the snaw's smoorin' in. I doot. I doot—Ah! yes, I maun believe ye're richt, Nicolet. Aye, mon, ye're richt. I can tell the stride o' yon lang-legged fort runner Maskwa an' the bulk o' Dunvegan. Spread yersels, ye fules—they're here."

Boring through undeterred, breaking the trail for the teams, taking the brunt of the blizzard came the tireless Ojibway fort runner. The body bent double against the wind, the lurch of the hips, the spring from the heel, the toe-twist of the lifting shoe, all bespoke the experienced tripper. Maskwa was old and wise on the trails.

A string of gray dots, the dog teams and the Kamattawa men crawled after. Up the bank they plunged and scurried through the stockade, scattering the loose drifts like foam.

"*Hu! Hu! Hu!*" shrieked the Indian dog drivers, directing the teams to the trading door with a tremendous cracking of their long lashes. There the *giddés* halted, whimpering in the traces. The arms and equipments were thrown inside. The storm-harried travelers stumbled after.

"Maurice, ye fule," fumed Donald

Muir, "fire up. Dinna stan' there wi' yer mouth open. Fire up, mon, fire up. Can you no see it's heat they want?"

The fussy, kind-hearted assistant trader seized Dunvegan's arm and hustled his superior to his room where he had thoughtfully prepared a dry set of garments.

"Yon's wha' ye need," he declared. "Ye'll feel warmer wi' a change." His attitude was full of solicitude hidden by a sort of proprietorship that Dunvegan had long ago come to recognize.

"You're like a mother to me, Donald," he laughed. "But I'm really wet through with hard work. The change of clothing is well thought of."

"The Factor wants tae confer wi' ye as soon as ye feel fit," announced the Scot. "I masel maun see tae the outfits."

He bustled off, sending half-breeds with the dog teams to the log building where the Company's *giddés* were kept, ordering food for men and animals, bestowing general comfort upon the Kamattawa stalwarts crouched around the fireplace.

Sandy Stewart, the lowland Scot, had been left in charge of the newly built fort. The rest of Dunvegan's tired followers were here. The flames licked the bronzed, familiar faces of Pete Connear, Terence Burke, Baptiste Verenne, Maskwa, Wahbiscaw, the hardy half-breeds, the trusted post Indians, the faithful *mètis*.

Loyal to the Company, they were here at the Company's call. And they had come as Desirée Lazard had idly prophesied.

"Kip back," Maurice Nicolet ordered the Oxford House loungers round the fire. "Let dese men have more room. You be well fed, warm—full of *tabac* smoke. Kip back. Better go ovaire to de store."

The permanent group obeyed. The new arrivals moved closer. Maurice stoked up, jamming the huge birch logs into the cavernous stone pit till it roared and throbbed like a giant engine. Every flicker of the warming fire draught sent the shivers over their frames, the reaction that comes of thorough chilling.

"Ba gosh," chattered Baptiste Verenne, "dis ees de wors' blizzard yet. Leesten dat, *mes camarades!*"

A tree crashed thunderously in the forest. Gathering momentum over the level sweep of Oxford Lake, the blasts struck the stockade with a sound like the rumbling of a thousand ice jams. The buildings rocked to the storm's wrath. Monstrous drifts threatened to bury them completely. The baffled frost, denied entrance, blew its angry congealing breath inch-thick upon the blurred window panes.

"Sounds lak de spreeng, eh?" grinned Baptiste.

"We'll run into a calm in the morning," Pete Connear prophesied knowingly. "She's been blowin' for fifty hours now. You'll see the wind drop about midnight."

Verenne made a gesture of unbelief.

"Mebbe," he grunted. "Mebbe."

"I know it," growled Connear. "Let me tell you, Frenchy, it will stop. I've weathered more gales than you ever heard of. It'll be calm tomorrow and colder than a Belle Isle iceberg." He lighted the pipe he had filled and lay back within the heat circle, blowing clouds of contentment.

Dunvegan dressed hastily. He was anxious to get out and go through his interview with the Factor in order that he might then have some time to pay a visit to a certain small cabin below the chapel. He had not seen Edwin Glyndon, the clerk, when he came in. Bruce wondered jealously if the young Englishman was at the Lazard home. The words of Basil Dreaulond, given as a friendly hint, had worked in him with the yeast of unrest, stirring up misgivings, forebodings, positive fears.

When Bruce crossed the trading room, he looked for Glyndon again, but the latter was not to be seen.

"Where's the clerk?" he asked, ad-

dressing his retainers sprawling close to the ruddy logs in the fireplace.

"Don't know," Connear answered. "I haven't seen him. Guess he's with the other Oxford House men. They're over at the store. Old Donald's gone across to start the packing."

"Better have your things dry and your gear all ready tonight," was the chief trader's parting advice. "Unless there is a change of plans, we start at dawn for Fort Brondel."

While he made his way to the Factor's house, the terrific wind seemed lessening in velocity, and the snow was settling in straighter lines. Yet the swaying forest held its dejected droop. The air had still that voice of wild desolation, symbolic of sorrow, of heartbreak, of desecration.

Seated somberly at the table in his council room, Malcolm MacLeod did not speak at Dunvegan's entrance. The chief trader, quite accustomed to the Factor's vagaries, waited unconcernedly on MacLeod's whim. Buried in his dark ruminations, the Factor sat immovable, his knitted eyebrows meeting, his piercing black eyes focused on the table center. Suddenly he banged the top with his fist.

"The girl Flora," he bellowed. "Any trace, any sight of her?"

"None," Dunvegan answered calmly. "I don't think we'll see her again till we stand inside the stockades of Fort La Roche."

"Which will be soon," grated MacLeod, with sinister emphasis. "I'll stand there, mind you, before spring runs out. I swear it."

The chief trader drew some closely written sheets from his pocket.

"Here is my report," he ventured by way of getting MacLeod's mind lifted from his hateful brooding. "This is the record of my daybook in duplicate. It will tell you everything. While good fortune blessed us at Kamattawa, things seem to have gone badly with you here."

"Gone badly," echoed the Factor sneeringly. "I call the loss of two fur trains, ten men and a clerk hellish."

"Clerk? Was Glyndon with them? Did he fall in the fight?" Eager curiosity was mingled with Dunvegan's great astonishment.

"No," growled MacLeod, "he wasn't with the fur trains. How could he be? Just a week ago today he married Lazard's niece, and they fled together."

CHAPTER VI

A VOW THAT HELD

AS A man who gets a knife blade in the ribs Dunvegan settled back in his chair. In spite of his tremendous self-control, the pallor crept up through his tan. His eyes widened and remained so, staring glazily. The Factor could not help but notice the change. He gazed a moment above the page he held.

"What's the matter?" he demanded in genuine surprise. Then recollection coming, he added: "Yes, I remember now. Let that be a lesson to you, Dunvegan. Don't trust a woman out of your sight. I speak from hard experience."

The chief trader pulled his pithless limbs together with an effort.

"There is a mistake somewhere," he began in a quiet, hollow voice. "What you say can not have happened."

"Why?"

"As you know, Desirée's feeling leaned toward the Nor'westers. She registered a vow that she would never marry a Hudson's Bay man."

"Neither she did."

"Don't fool with riddles," breathed Dunvegan. "Speak it out."

"She didn't marry a Hudson's Bay man," MacLeod asserted grimly. "That traitor of a Glyndon turned Nor'wester and fled. Now do you understand?"

Amid a tumultuous rush of mingled feelings, condemnation, anger, jealousy, despair, Dunvegan understood to the bitter full. For several silent minutes

he sat there, fighting his conflicting emotions, getting a grip on himself. The Factor read on at the duplicate sheets with stolid absorption.

"Who married them?" was the question that interrupted. Dunvegan had forced his vocal cords into mechanical action.

"Father Brochet," muttered MacLeod, not looking up.

"And where are they, do you know?"

"Not I," snarled the Factor, stopping his study of the report. "Most likely they are now in the Nor'west fort at La Roche."

"With Black Ferguson!" Bruce leaped to his feet and paced and repaced the council room with long, savage strides. The Factor watched him, smiling cynically, as if discovering some new trait in the man. A dozen times the chief trader tramped the floor. Then he whirled in the middle of a stride.

"This thing was planned," he averred. "The clerk was approached from the outside."

"I know that!" MacLeod's eyes darkened and narrowed a little.

"By whom?"

"It is obvious."

"The Nor'westers—directly?"

"Undoubtedly." The Factor laid down the report upon the council table. Dunvegan resumed his frantic walk, again pausing uncertainly.

"But the means—the means!" he exclaimed petulantly.

MacLeod's teeth snapped shut and opened grudgingly for speech.

"Ha!" he gritted. "You'll pity the means—if I discover it. We have had spies sneaking about Oxford House. Sometimes I think they must have been inside the stockades, although that is a wild thought. Be this fact as it may, the truth remains that Glyndon was approached directly by an agent of the Nor'westers. Under the powerful combination of the enemy's inducements and the girl's persuasions his desertion must have been a comparatively easy matter."

"Curse his soft eyes!" cried the chief trader. "We might have known better than trust him. And they sent him away from London temptations in order that the Company might give him a certificate of manhood! How could a man be made from a bit of slime, a rotten shell, a colored rag? Betrayal must have been born in him. Did you order no pursuit?"

The Factor shook his shaggy hair as he gathered up his papers.

"They had twenty hours' start and good dogs," he explained. "Besides, they fled while it was snowing and left no trail."

"Where's Brochet?" demanded Dunvegan suddenly and irrelevantly.

"Somewhere down Blazing Pine River on a mission to sick Indians," Malcolm MacLeod replied. "He left shortly after it happened."

At the end of this questioning, with the little dream-things he had fashioned scattered to the far compass points as the blizzard outside had scattered the snowflakes, Dunvegan felt the sickening of supreme despair. No visible resource stretched before him. He relapsed into sullen inertia.

"Is that all?" the Factor asked, placing his duplicate sheets in numbered sequence.

"All but one other thing."

"And that?"

Dunvegan hesitated. "When I brought Flora MacLeod and Running Wolf here," he commenced awkwardly, "I met a strange canoe on Lake Lemeau. In that canoe with two Indian paddlers were two United States marshals named Granger and Garfield. Their passes were good. Their papers I requested of them."

The chief trader paused to note the effect of his words on MacLeod. But there was no effect, except that the Factor had squared his bulk in his council chair as if to face an emergency.

"Go on," he urged grimly.

"It seemed they were searching for a man whom they suspected of living in the wilderness under an assumed name. They had his photograph."

"You saw that photograph?"

"I did."

"You knew it?"

"No."

The movement of the Factor's body was swiftly reversed. He breathed deeply with something of relief, a relief that fled at the chief trader's next statement.

"I did not know the original of the picture," Dunvegan asserted, but I was told who it was."

"By whom?" The question shot like a bullet.

"By Flora MacLeod. Privately, you understand. Her information was given me after these two marshals were gone."

"Whose picture was it?" MacLeod asked doggedly, with the manner of putting an issue to the test.

"Your own," the chief trader answered, "at the age of thirty."

Expecting a dynamic outburst, Dunvegan was completely surprised at the Factor's stoic composure. The massive limbs never offered to spring from the chair; the face preserved its rigid, inscrutable lines.

"You were satisfied with that information, were you?" MacLeod interrogated.

"Yes."

"It satisfies you still?"

"It does."

"You did not mention the circumstance at the time," the Factor went on. "Why refer to it now?"

Dunvegan leaned his arms on the table directly opposite MacLeod, meeting unafraid the piercing glances of those electric eyes, the eyes which he could now recognize as belonging to the original of the photograph.

"Because it is now necessary," he answered. "If it were not, I would not have opened the subject. In the space of another day or two those deputies will make Oxford House. At this moment they are laid up beyond Kabeke Bluffs, not caring to face the blizzard. We passed them there."

MacLeod was half out of his chair, an unspoken question blazing from those magnetic eyes. Dunvegan answered it with hauteur and a little scorn.

"I'm no informer," he declared. "Somehow they've got trace of you at the other forts. These men had official entry to both Hudson's Bay and Nor'-west posts, and they must have covered the territory pretty well."

"Why do you tell me this?" demanded MacLeod, with sudden asperity.

"Out of a sense of duty."

"You think me a hunted criminal?" The Factor's tone held resentment and bitterness which was probably impersonal.

"I forbear to think," answered Dunvegan. "Your affairs are none of my business."

"Yet you serve me. Why serve a man with a supposed stain upon him? Why not follow, rather, our friend Glyndon's move?"

"I serve the Company," was the chief trader's response. "The moral status of the Company's officers cannot affect that fundamental duty—service."

The Factor looked long at Dunvegan, marveling at his integrity, his lack of low curiosity, his allegiance.

"Bruce," he said—and it was not often he used the Christian name—"you're one of the true Northern breed, the shut-mouthed men. Let me tell you a little phase of American life. Twenty years ago there lived over there in one of the big cities a family by the name of Macfarlane. The family consisted of the husband and wife, a daughter, and a son. There was also an intruding element, and this intruder was named James Funster. You see, Funster had loved Macfarlane's wife before she married, and even after the marriage he could not

like an honorable man get over his passion. Do you follow me?"

Dunvegan nodded. He had guessed this much from former hints MacLeod had given him.

"Well," continued the Factor, "project your thoughts ahead. Imagine the mad things that come into the brain of the infatuated. Imagine also Macfarlane's horror at what happened. One day he was away with his daughter. On his return he found his wife murdered and his son stolen. Without a doubt it was Funster's work. But notice how Fate acted. Suspicion fell upon the husband, suggesting the motive of jealousy He fled, and the blot still rests on his name."

"How old were the children?" asked Dunvegan excitedly.

"They were very young," MacLeod answered evasively, "just a year between them. I think I have said enough to show you that I am no criminal. That was twenty years ago, but the false accusation still follows me."

"And you," ventured Bruce—"you are Macfarlane?"

"I am Alexander Macfarlane."

"And where is Funster?"

"Ah!" grated MacLeod. "Tell *me* that."

Dunvegan rose up, his own disappointment overshadowed by the portentous resurrection of an old tragedy.

"You are innocent," he cried, "and those men will be here tomorrow or the next day."

"And tomorrow or the next day I shall be at Fort Dumarge."

"But they can follow."

"Let them. Or let them await me here. What good will it do them? They came in on a long trail, but they may go out on a longer one."

Dunvegan stared at the dark, glowering visage and shivered involuntarily.

"What one?" he asked under his breath, although he knew.

"*La Longue Traverse*—The Long Traverse," the Factor decreed.

CHAPTER VII

THE IRON TRAIL

PLUFF! PLUFF! The crunching of Maskwa's snowshoes sounded back through the bitter starlight of the dawn. Taking advantage with his skilful heel-spring of the resilience of the taut shoe webbing and the elasticity of the curved frames, Maskwa ran easily for a long, lurching stride. The shifting of his whole weight from one foot to the other sank his racquettes in the snow with uniform pressure. The ankle's side-swing came with unfailing precision. The Ojibway traveled like a machine, perfectly poised and full of potential strength. Thus he could run, if need be, from sun to sun.

Behind him in the broken trail galloped the first of the six dog teams that carried the outfits. Five half-breed track-beaters packed the snow in front of the other sledges. Six Indians drove. At intervals the positions were shifted, each team taking its turn at the lead where lay the heaviest toil.

"Mush! Mush!" cried the Indian dog drivers. *Crack! Crack!* snapped the whips in weird staccato. These sounds with the noises of travel were the only ones to echo through the white stillness. For the rest the Hudson's Bay men went in silence because the cold was that awful cold that strangles the northern world before sunrise. Its frigid hands seemed to catch their chests and clamp their lungs tight. A gauntlet removed to allow the fastening of a moccasin lace, the adjustment of the parka hood or the clearing of iced eyelashes, left the bare fingers numbed by the cruel frost which bit through the flesh and lacerated the tense nerves underneath. Through many a dawn-hour had these Northmen fought this freezing horror. On countless trails had they come face to face with this death-masked ice spirit. Well they knew their capabilities. Closely they guarded their energies. With all

his relentless power and subtlety, the frost fiend might not take them unawares.

Steadily moved the long line of men across the wind-packed surface of Oxford Lake, their bodies leaning forward at identical angles, their limbs swinging with machine-like regularity. Shoulders heaving at their collars, the dog teams ran in their own peculiar fashion, heads down, tongues lolling between steaming jaws. So exactly alike the outfits seemed, that the hindmost ones might have been the oft-repeated shadow of the foremost brushing back across the snows, indistinct, vague beneath the waning starlight.

Quitting Oxford Lake at Kowasin Inlet, the trains ascended Kabeke Ridge that they might make the descent on the other side to the smooth ice of Blazing Pine River which would afford them easy progress for many miles. Among the trees of the crest the cavalcade lost definition. The men were merely shadows on the snow, flicking ghost-like between the silhouetted tree trunks. The dogs were wolfish things sneaking low to the ground.

The utter silence of the morning was ethereal in its intangibility. Sharp detonations of frost-split trees brought contrasts that ripped the screen of silence with weird, unearthly noises. A phosphorescent glimmer smeared the crust. Little shadowy shapes began to dance before the men's snow-stung eyes. A suggestion of mirages drifted here and there.

Where the course of march led from the elevated ridge to the low river surface the incline fell so sharply that extreme care was necessary to make the descent in safety. The Indian dog drivers whipped up their teams to force them in a direct line, while some clung to the sledges that they might not break away wildly and overrun the rushing *giddés*.

The plunge beat up a cloud of foaming snow particles. Sled after sled shot down. The men half coasted, half ran with amazing speed on the feathery slope. An immense groove in the white covering of the mountainside showed after them. They turned down Blazing Pine, on the banks of which was the Indian encampment Father Brochet had gone to visit in his mission of administering to the sick.

Maskwa, the tireless, still broke the trail. Dunvegan sent forward Black Fox, a sinewy Salteaux Indian, to relieve him for a space, but the Ojibway smiled a little and refused.

"Strong Father," protested Black Fox, dropping back, "this Maskwa the swift one will not listen. Nor will he give me the task. His legs are of iron, and his lungs are spirit's lungs—they breathe forever. Strong Father, there is none like him from Wenipak to Big Waters."

"That's true, Black Fox," commented the leader of the expedition, "but he should take some rest."

Dunvegan sped forward till he was running side by side with the Ojibway.

"Maskwa, my brother," he urged, "take the easy place for an hour. It is not well to punish yourself."

The fort runner smiled again. He had ideal features for an Indian, and the stamp of noble lineage was set upon the bold curve of brow, nose and chin.

"Strong Father," he replied, "it is not hard for me. I will keep on, for I would have my own eyes search the trail ahead. There are spies about. Let Strong Father mark how the fur trains were sought out and set upon. Mark how the French Hearts took council to surprise Oxford House. We have need to keep the clear eye. We must go swiftly but craftily. Therefore, Strong Father, let Maskwa have the lead. His sight will not fail you."

The Objibway's dark face glowed earnestly in the golden haze of light which heralded the near appearance of the sun. He was running as easily and breathing as quietly as he had done in the first mile they traversed.

"As you will," conceded Dunvegan. "You have my trust."

The chief trader dropped back in turn with the main body. Maskwa spurted far ahead, performing the duty of scout as well as that of track beater. Before the Nor'westers could compass another surprise, they would have to reckon with the cunning Ojibway.

Steadily on went the file of dog trains. The men were feeling the cold less. By this time extreme exertion had infused a warm glow in each man's frame. Eyes gleaming brighter for the fringe of filmed ice above, lips blowing cloud-breaths, clothes frost-rimmed from overactivity, these Hudson's Bay giants held on their way. Soon they came to the branching of the Blazing Pine River and continued down that tributary which curved by the Indian village lying three hours' journey below the junction point.

At last the belated run rose over the spruce trees, glaring with a sort of amazed wrath upon these travelers who had taken advantage of his slumber to win so many miles of their hard march. But the wrath subsided, lost in the rosy day dreams that wrapped earth and sky in a brilliant winter mist.

In the late forenoon Maskwa sighted the Indian village in the middle distance. Dunvegan decided to make midday camp there. He gave the order to his men, an order that was received with great alacrity.

"*Chac! Chac! Chac!*" yelled the drivers to the *giddés*, enforcing the order with splitting reports from the long lashes of their dog whips. Gleefully and dutifully the sledge animals turned toward the Cree tepees pitched permanently in the warm shelter of a pine forest to the left of the river. At the thought of rest, a good meal and a smoke the Hudson's Bay men dashed forward jauntily, eager to make the bivouac. But an Indian, running out of the winter wigwams, stopped Maskwa from entering by a peculiar motion of his crossed hands. The others saw the fort runner halt in his tracks and draw away, while a momentary conference in the native dialect took place.

The Ojibway beckoned to Dunvegan who ran up hastily.

"Strong Father," spoke Maskwa quickly, "an Indian has come to this village and he has fever. We cannot enter. Else will the fever spirit destroy our men."

"Where's Father Brochet?" Bruce demanded, speaking in Cree. "Where is the priest—the praying man. Bid him come out."

On the summons Father Brochet appeared. His greetings were none the less cheerful for the distance that intervened between the friends.

"It wouldn't be wise to come in," the priest called, "and risk exposure to infection. This case isn't so bad, but you know the dangers. The Indian came from the tribe on Loon Lake, and some of his fellows up there are sick with the same thing. When I get him in shape so that the Indian women can bring him through, I am going up to see after the others."

"Loon Lake!" exclaimed Dunvegan. "That's up beyond Fort Brondel. You'd better be careful when you are in Nor'-west haunts."

"The Nor'westers don't trouble the men of God," returned Brochet simply. "I have no fear of them. We are indispensable to both Hudson's Bay servants and Nor'westers."

He smiled grimly at the significance of his plain words.

"But lately men on our side have died unshriven," the chief trader observed bitterly. "There is a chance that the same may happen to the enemy."

"You are heading for Fort Brondel?"

"With all haste. The sack of our Wokattiwagan train will be speedily and thoroughly avenged."

"And the Factor has set out to raze Fort Dumarge as he planned?"

"Yes. We both have hoped to surprise

the Nor'west forts for, failing that, we must sit down to a long siege."

Brochet shivered a little even in the sheltered place where he stood.

"It is bad weather for a siege," he commented, "and the Nor'westers are as cunning as wolves. You know, I suppose, about—about Edwin Glyndon?"

Dunvegan's face was hard as a mask. By this time he had curbed his emotions.

"I know—that is, I heard," his answer came slowly. "Tell me all about that marriage, Brochet."

The priest raised his hand in a deprecating fashion and shook his head out of pity for his friend's disappointment.

"There is nothing to tell," was his low response. "It was a swift, eager wooing—a sort of autumn dream. The golden woods and the white moons were theirs for an uninterrupted, rapturous space. The fascination was intense. Its durability I cannot judge. The climax compelled their marriage. My hope is that Glyndon may prove worthy."

"Amen," Dunvegan breathed. He seemed desirous of hearing no more, and signaled for the train to move on.

"If on your return from Loon Lake the Company's banner flaps over Fort Brondel, give me a call," was his parting word to Father Brochet.

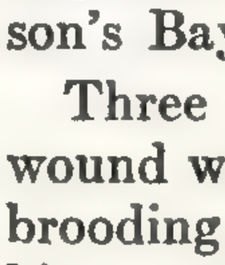
"Indeed, yes," the kindly priest promised. "And watch carefully, my son. Guard your person against your enemy, and guard your passions as well. Remember that he who conquers himself is greater than the lord of all the Hudson's Bay districts."

Three miles farther the calvalcade wound with the frozen river. Dunvegan, brooding within himself, as had been his custom of late, took little note of its progress. The leadership had devolved for the moment on Maskwa. Presently the tall Ojibway answered the call of his stomach. He stopped beneath a jutting headland and looked once at the sun. Then with his native abruptness he twisted his heels from the loops of his snowshoes.

"Camp here," he decreed.

CHAPTER VIII

MASKWA'S FIND



A FORK of fire leaped up under the quick hands of the Indians. The dead spruce boughs crackled merrily. Bap-

tiste Verenne lay back on a pile of green branches before the flames and hummed to the kettles that they might the more quickly melt their contents of snow into water and boil the tea. His high tenor voice chanted the air of *L'Exile*, a song of far-off France. Very dreamily and softly he sang:

"Combien j'ai douce souvenance
Du joli lieu de ma naissance!
Ma cœur, qu'ils étaient beaux, les jours de France!
O mon pays! sois mes amours,
O mon pays! sois mes amours. Toujours!"

Over the spruce fire the kettles began to drone to his music as he went on more tenderly:

"Te souvient-il que notre mère,
Au foyer de notre chaumière,
Nous pressait sur son coeur joyeux, ma chère?
Et nous baisons ses blancs cheveux, tous deux."

Almost while Baptiste sang, the meal was ready. The Hudson's Bay men thawed their stripes of jerked caribou over the coals and washed the meat down with small pails of hot tea. They snatched a few whiffs from their pipes before the command to march was given.

The afternoon sun shed abundance of light but afforded no warmth. The traveling was through a cheerless cold that intensified by degrees. The toil of marching had begun to tell on the men; they moved with less elasticity; their limbs began to lag as from some indefinable hindering pressure. This pressure seemed to come from without, like unfriendly hands holding them back, but they knew it was really the weakening fibers protesting from within.

Only three of the travelers were untouched by this peculiar lethargy. Maskwa ran as ever with his unchanging, lurching stride. Dunvegan, knowing not the hint of weariness, traveled mechanically, his mind dwelling on personal things. And Baptiste Verenne still hummed of his sunny France, asking:

"Te souvient-il du lac tranquille
Que'effleurait l'hirondelle agile,
Du vent qui courbait le roseau Mobile,
Et du soleil couchant sur l'eau. Si beau?
Ma cœur, te souv—"

"G'wan, Baptiste, ye Frinch rogue," cried Terence Burke, "ye've no sister here to ask that. An' phwat's the use o' askin'? Shure it's not France but Greenland we're in. An' it's on a treadmill o' snow we're walkin'."

Pete Connear kicked the Irishman's calves from behind with the toes of his snowshoes.

"Walk faster, man," he urged. "It makes it twice as easy and the frost doesn't touch you then."

But Terence shivered in the trail. The sweat of the morning's travel had chilled on him at the noonday halt, and he felt the lowering temperature keenly.

"It's so beastly cold," he groaned dismally, "that me thoughts freeze 'fore oi can express thim."

The sailor kicked him again to cheer him up. "Bucko! Bucko!" he growled.

And Baptiste Verenne, smiling, flashed white teeth over his shoulder and remarked: "Mebbe you don' lak remembaire somet'ing lak dat in your own countree. Eh, dat so, M'sieu Burke?"

Terence frowned. Baptiste's smile grew more mischievous as he continued:

"Te souvient-il de cette amie,
Douce compagne de ma vie?
Dans les bois, en cueillant la fleur Jolie,
Hélène appuyait sur mon cœur. Son cœur.

Oh, qui rendra mon Hélène,
Et la montagne, et le grand chêne?
Leur souvenir fait tous les jours ma peine.
Mon pays sera mes amours. Toujours!"

The latter half of the day wore to a desolate grayness. The Hudson's Bay force was now in Nor'west country, and a strict lookout had to be maintained. Night approached quickly as the sun dipped. Maskwa, keeping closer to the main body, signaled that he had found something. Dunvegan ran up to him hastily.

The Indian stood pointing to the tracks made by a single person on snow-

shoes. The marks lay diagonally across their line of progress.

"Strong Father, see," Maskwa requested.

"Some trapper," commented the chief trader. "The shoes are Ojibway pattern."

"Yes," assented Maskwa quietly. "I made the shoes."

Dunvegan scanned him sharply in the gathering dark.

"You?" he cried, astonished. "How do you know that?"

"By the knots," Maskwa answered, stooping to point out little dents in the snow pattern. "See how they lie in a curve? No one but Maskwa makes them that way."

"Whose feet?" demanded Dunvegan, with swift suspicion. "Whose feet are in those shoes?"

The fort runner felt the pressed flakes gently before speaking. He arose immediately from the stooping posture.

"The Little Fool's," was the response. "And he has just passed here."

"Gaspard Follet's tracks!" exclaimed the chief trader incredulously. "Maskwa, are you sure you are not mistaken?"

"I am not mistaken, Strong Father," the Ojibway declared gravely. "In the summer moons I made the shoes for the Little Fool. Give me leave to follow. I will bring him to you. He is no farther away than the ridge of balsam."

"Go," ordered Dunvegan curtly.

The fort runner launched himself into the gloom of the stunted shrubbery. Bunching where their leader was halted, the Hudson's Bay men waited silently. Presently there sounded the double crunch of two pairs of racquettes on the brittle crust. The branches of the dwarfed evergreens swayed. Maskwa strode out, dragging a diminutive figure by one arm.

"Here, Strong Father, is the Little Fool," he announced without emotion.

At the sight of the Oxford House men Gaspard Follet began to utter a series of joyous squeals.

"Blessed be the Virgin!" he cried. "Here is safety. Oh! name of the dead saints, I was lost, lost—lost."

He sprang to Dunvegan, ingratiating himself, praising, fawning, beseeching. The Ojibway fort runner looked grimly at the antics of his prize.

"The Little Fool is glad to meet with the Company's servants," he observed in ironic fashion. "It gives him great joy."

Dunvegan looked into Maskwa's face, quite surprised at the tone.

"Why not?" he questioned.

"That did not dwell in his mind until I caught him," the Indian declared. "Neither was the Little Fool lost."

"What do you mean, Maskwa?" Dunvegan asked. "My brother, you speak in riddles. Gaspard has evidently wandered from Oxford House and lost his way." To the idiot, he added: "Do you know where you are at all?"

"No, no," moaned Gaspard piteously. "I was lost, I tell you. I do not know this country."

The Ojibway fort runner grunted in derision.

"Strong Father," he said, the Little Fool was not lost as you believe. He has been following the Caribou Ridge all day. And Strong Father will remember that the trail on the Caribou Ridge, though it cannot be traveled with dog teams, shortens by half the distance to the fort of the French Hearts were we journey. That is how the Little Fool thought to reach it first."

The Indian stopped his speech abruptly and took a stride onward, as if this circumstance was no concern of his. Dunvegan halted him, crying out:

"Hold there, Maskwa! Do you pretend to suspect Gaspard?"

Maskwa made a gesture of complete unconcern.

"I have spoken," he returned placidly.

"Why," fumed Dunvegan, "such a thing in my estimation is incredible—preposterous. The idea of that dwarf,

that idiot— No! It's too ridiculous."

"I have spoken," repeated Maskwa, in the same even key.

When the chief trader attempted to question him by way of discovering his exact meaning, the Ojibway maintained a stubborn silence which he broke only with a suggestion about the night camp.

"Turn to the ridge of balsam, Strong Father," he advised. "We shall find it good to rest there."

Dunvegan accepted his trusted runner's hint. He knew that the Indian eye read wilderness signs which no white man living could ever interpret. He understood that the Indian brain gleaned an intelligence from inanimate things which the greatest mind of civilization could never comprehend. Therefore he was content to follow the native wisdom and follow it unseeingly, for at Maskwa's word he had walked blindly to his own ultimate advantage some hundreds of times.

So the Oxford House men diverged from their course on the first track that Gaspard Follett had tramped in the snowy ridge where it crossed the Blazing Pine River. The Ojibway went ahead, and, when lost to the view of his fellows among the timber, he paralleled Gaspard's trail at some distance first on one side and then on the other. Soon he found what he sought and tramped on to the balsams, grunting with great satisfaction.

When Dunvegan and his retainers reached the balsam ridge, Maskwa stood there awaiting them. He called the chief trader aside.

"Strong Father," he began in a low voice, "does a lost man throw away his rifle and his food?"

"No!" exclaimed Dunvegan. "Why?"

Maskwa put his hand into a green tree and held out two objects.

"Because here is the rifle and the packsack of the Little Fool."

The chief trader wheeled with hot accusations for Gaspard Follet, but Maskwa checked them.

"Softly, Strong Father," was his caution. "I have something else to show you first."

"But he is a spy," murmured Dunvegan, trying to keep his voice down in spite of his anger. "I see it all now— curse his blithering impudence! What dolts we have been at Oxford House. And he fooled Malcolm MacLeod! What infants! A fool, a dwarf, an idiot to get the best of us! Maskwa, I think we need some guidance such as yours."

"The Little One is a dwarf," conceded Maskwa, "but he is not an idiot. Neither is he a fool, though the name comes easily to my tongue. Strong Father, he has the wisdom of a beaver and the heart of a fox. But at last he is trapped."

"I'll bind him," declared Dunvegan, full of vexation and self-contempt. "I'll tie the rat fast so that he can't outwit the elephants.

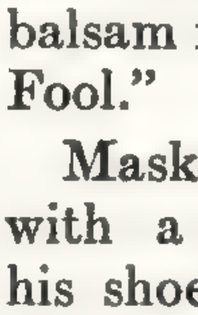
"Wait," begged the Ojibway fort runner. "Come to the top of the ridge of balsam first. Then we can bind the Little Fool."

Maskwa pushed through the trees with a slouching movement. He set his shoes without the slightest noise in the soft, deep undersnows of the evergreens. Dunvegan did likewise, taking care to snap no twig. On the crest which commanded the open valley, the Ojibway pushed aside the thick branches hanging screen-like over the edge.

"Strong Father, look!" he directed.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST BLOW



MECHANICALLY Dunvegan counted the dogs teams that crossed the valley before his gaze. Five great sleds he made out, sleds piled high with huge bales of furs. Two men accompanied each sledge, a driver and an armed guard. Evidently the train was going

into camp under the shoulders of Caribou Ridge.

"Strong Father did not think that any of the French Hearts were so near?" ventured Maskwa quietly.

"No," the chief trader muttered, "I did not. They are halting. It is well that they did not get sight of us, Maskwa, for I fancy we could never catch those big fresh teams if they started to run."

The Ojibway nodded gravely as he peered, animal-like, between two large tree trunks.

Maskwā

"That is why I bade Strong Father keep with the ridge," he replied. "On the River of the Blazing Pine the French Hearts would have seen us easily where the valleys meet."

"You knew it was coming, this Niskitowaney fur train?"

"Even so, Strong Father."

"How?"

"By the actions of the Little Fool."

"What was Gaspard doing?"

The fort runner pointed to a ledge of rock that jutted out on the highest point of the hill.

"The Little Fool stood there, waiting," he observed. "He had seen the fur train of the French Hearts coming and thought to travel with them to their fort. But soon his thoughts were changed. He saw me and disappeared in the trees. When I caught him, he had no food or rifle. Yet I brought them to you, Strong Father."

Maskwa summed up: "He is a little devil as well as a little fool. He deserves no pity. Mark you, Strong Father, he has been the right hand of that wicked French Heart, the Black Ferguson. Does Strong Father remember the ambush on Caribou Point when we thought to take the leader? Who brought the news? Who led us there? Who had planned the surprise with the French Hearts? None but the Little Fool. Who gave them notice of the movements of our fur trains? The Little Fool. Who warned the Crees to fall upon you as you journeyed to Kamattawa? Why, Strong Father, it is always the Little Fool. And his weak brain seems stronger than the wisdom of the Stern Father and his servants. He has laughed at us all."

"Yes," grumbled Dunvegan, "he has fooled us for a long time, but that time is gone."

"While the wolf lives, his teeth may still rend," Maskwa philosophized. "Let the Little Fool die. Else will he work Strong Father greater harm."

The calm suggestion brought an expression of repugnance to the chief trader's face.

"I can't do that," he objected.

"It is well," remarked the Ojibway. "I have counseled."

"As a prisoner he cannot do us any harm," Dunvegan persisted.

"I have counseled," Maskwa repeated. "When Strong Father wishes it had been done, he will remember my counsel."

He dismissed the subject with habitual unconcern and devoted a few minutes to spying upon the camping preparations of the Nor'west fur train. With the movements of skilled woodsmen they set about it. First of all, they stepped

out of their snowshoe loops and diligently used the racquettes as shovels, clearing the snow away and banking it up till a long rectangle of ground lay bare. While some thickly carpeted the cleared space with balsam brush taken from the foot of the ridge, others chopped dead pines into firewood and built a long stringer of flame the entire length of the camp ground.

Then the dogs were unharnessed and the sledges drawn up by thongs into handy trees out of reach of these huskies, who otherwise would destroy the furs while the men slept. After that the Nor'west drivers and guards threw themselves down by the fires to prepare their supper of dried meat and tea, having already stuck the dogs' portion of frozen whitefish upon twigs to thaw by the fierce blaze.

From the height Dunvegan and Maskwa watched it all.

"They know how to make camp, all right, the chief trader observed.

The Ojibway nodded briefly.

"They have also traveled many trails," he supplemented judicially.

"And since it is a good camp, we will not need to change it," continued Dunvegan significantly.

"It is well," grunted Maskwa. He shook the screening boughs back in place and turned about, adding: "When the dark falls thickly, we will come this way again."

The Oxford House men were growing impatient in the increasing cold, but they received the news of the Nor'west fur train's proximity with jubilation. The frost was becoming so intense that to do without a fire even for a few hours proved impossible; so the whole force backtrailed a mile as a precaution and huddled over a hastily built pyramid of lighted spruce branches. The Caribou Ridge, looming up, shut off the flames from the Nor'wester's view. Also, Dunvegan posted an Indian lookout on the height above the other bivouac to carry warning of any untoward move. The dogs' jaws were tied with strips of buckskin that they might not growl or bark, for sounds carried far in the frosty air.

Attention was now paid to Gaspard Follet, and he was placed in the custody of two Hudson's Bay men, who had orders to shoot him on his first attempt at escape. He still kept up his pretense of foolish wits, but a sinister threat from Dunvegan silenced his idiotic whining. The chief trader did not condescend to parley with Follet nor tell him of what he was suspected. He simply ordered the dwarf into strict charge. It was the business of Malcolm MacLeod, the Factor, to judge him.

The hour of waiting while the gray twilight thickened to black dark became oppressive. The Oxford House men chafed under the restraint and the silence. Other than murmurings and flame noises no sounds came from around the fire. Terence Burke had soaked himself through and through with the radiating heat. Complacently he pawed his limbs. Now these limbs, reinvigorated, cried out for active work as loudly as his hungry stomach cried for food.

He whispered to Connear: "'Tis a bloomin' wake we're at. Phwat's the use o' dallyin' loike this? Why don't we take those Nor'westers by the scruffs o' their necks an' shake thim? They're outnumbered four to wan."

"Mind your own business," growled Connear. "You keep mixin' yourself up with every plan that's being made. You're too fresh. Keep your own place, you Irish lubber, and don't try runnin' the whole show."

Baptiste Verenne flashed his customary grin, with the attribute of ivory teeth.

"*Oui,*" he commented, "kip de place an' go ver' cautious. Dat's de way in dis countree. You see, we mus' spreeng on dose mans *vite* w'en dey not t'ink. Geeve dem no taim harness de fas' dogs. Dat's onlee way we get dem."

"It's a slow sphring," Terence complained. "If the recoil's as slow as the sphring, bewitch me if divil a thing comes av it."

"Shut up," commanded Connear tersely. "Your mouth's as big as the Irish sea."

"Yes," snapped Burke, "an' it's swallowed better sailors than yerself."

Baptiste made an angry gesture for quiet and motioned furtively to where Dunvegan stood silently warming himself on the other side of the fire.

"Ba gosh, you be stubborn mans!" he snarled contemptuously.

But now the order came to move. Several Indians were left with the sledges and the prisoner. The rest of the men filed off in the direction of the balsam ridge. Its crest was reached silently and in perfect order. There the men paused at a point directly over the camp they purposed to rush.

Maskwa, with Dunvegan, surveyed the slope, contemplating the moment of descent. Far below they could see the line of crackling fire with the banked snow at the sides glowing pink beneath the blaze. Etched out dully against the fitful flame, the squatting figures crouched low. At times a hand was cleanly outlined in the white upper light as it raised food to mouth. A tea pail passing down the line of men flashed intermittently.

"Now while they eat is the time, Strong Father," the Ojibway fort runner murmured. "They think only of their stomachs, and their arms are not handy. If we are swift and sure on our feet, not a shot need be fired."

"Very well," assented Dunvegan. "You lead. I will stay on your heels."

"Let the men make no sound," warned Maskwa. "We go without noise as close as possible. As soon as their dogs scent us, we must spring like the hungry panther."

The chief trader passed a whispered caution to his retainers.

"Keep close to us," he adjured, "and rush when we rush. Grasp the Nor'westers and prevent them from shooting. There is no need for bloodshed, and we cannot afford to lose any of our number. Every man we have will be needed at Fort Brondel."

There was a faint, dissatisfied murmur at this command. Fresh in the minds of the Hudson's Bay men were the accounts given by survivors of the bloody sacking of the Wokattiwagan and Shamattawa fur trains. They would have liked a sanguinary reprisal, but they knew better than to disobey any order of Dunvegan's. So they relinquished their vengeful anticipations and followed watchfully.

Down the snowy hillside they dropped, noiseless as shadows. No figure at the fire stirred from its eating; no dog voiced alarm. The balsams were left behind and the men entered scrubby spruces, where they found better cover.

The camp was no more than a little dome of light walled in by impenetrable darkness. The night crowded to its red ramparts, full of mystery, unreadable, sinister, fear-compelling. And, crowding like the night, came the Oxford House force, with all the advantage of position that the darkness gave.

Slowly, their nerves growing more tense at every step, they worked through the spruces. Each yard they advanced increased the strain. A little drumming noise began to vibrate in the men's throats. An almost inaudible sound it was, but to their strained hearing it rose in a roar. Closer and closer they stole till, seeing their enemies so plainly, the idea that they themselves must be seen impressed itself with ever-increasing power.

Maskwa treaded the evergreen aisles like a swift wraith. Holding the ends of each other's sashes, the rest walked in single file after him. So great was the curb on their feelings, so suffocating the silence, that some would have gained

immense relief by uttering tremendous shouts. But they dared not. The first outcry would come from the camp. The alarm would ring out unexpectedly, and the invaders waited for that moment and wrestled with their tingling senses.

Forty paces! The impaled whitefish before the fires looked ludicrously large, like young sharks. Thirty paces! The ruddy blaze limned the dark, lean-featured countenances of the Nor'westers, resting in natural unconsciousness of impending disaster. Twenty-five! The nervous tension snapped with a sudden mental jerk that set every sinew in the men's bodies tingling.

The suspicious huskies blew loudly and growled. Instinctively the Nor'west guards reached quickly for their guns, only to be seized by the shoulders and hurled back into the snow. The camp turned instantly to a mass of rolling, grappling bodies. Red coals kicked into the banks sent forth hissing steam clouds. Feet stamped, plunged and twisted here and there, throwing up white spurts of snow, knocking burning branches through the air, tripping opponents with savage force.

The struggle took place practically in silence except for the uneasy snarling of the dogs and the heavy breathing and occasional oaths of the men. Often a knife blade gleamed redly as it poised for a blow. The thud of steel on flesh and the groan of pain followed.

Then, bringing the climax of brute savagery, the howling huskies charged, indifferent whether their chisel-like fangs sliced master or master's foe. But they had waited too long. The moment when their assault might have seriously hindered the Hudson's Bay men—in the initial minute of the fight—was past. Half a dozen of Dunvegan's followers sprang out of the mêlée and, catching up dog whips, flailed neutrality through their tough hides.

The cowing of the Nor'westers' huskies was coincident with the overpowering of the Nor'westers themselves. Held in the grip of two, and often three antagonists, each of the guards and the Indian drivers was subdued, bound and laid beside the racked-up fire.

In a sullen line they lay, beaten but full of stubborn enmity. To that line Dunvegan added Gaspard Follet when the Company's sledges come on. The capture of the Niskitowaney fur train was complete.

CHAPTER X

THE HEART OF THE SAVAGE

IMMEDIATELY the Oxford House men re-established the camp to suit their own requirements. Then they devoted themselves to a long-delayed supper till their ravenous appetites were fully appeased. The dogs of the Nor'westers had been fed to keep them quiet. The turn of the newly arrived teams came when the masters were satisfied. Baptiste Verenne and the drivers arose, taking the allotted portion of thawed whitefish. They took their dog whips also.

"*Ici, giddés,*" Baptiste called.

The animals leaped forward on the instant, growling and slavering for the whitefish. One meal in twenty-four hours was not in anywise sufficient for the work they were doing, and now it was three hours past their customary space of fasting. A sound kicking met their energetic advance, and they were scattered out that they might be more easily fed. Then the Nor'westers' dogs jumped in, making a tangle of furry backs, bushy tails and snapping jaws.

On these intruders the heavy whips smote viciously. They retreated, thoroughly cowed, and with sharp commands, kicks and blows the food was at length distributed. The more cunning beasts bolted their two whitefish in a flash and fought with slower comrades for their remaining portion. Slowly the

tumult died down and the dogs crept up close to the lower end of the fire where brush beds had been thrown for them.

Having indulged in a brief after-supper smoke, the Hudson's Bay men began to prepare for immediate slumber. They removed their outer parkas with the capotes and hung them on sticks to dry before the fire, together with gauntlets, leggings and traveling shoepacks.

They put on great, fur-lined sleeping moccasins and rolled themselves in thick fur robes designed for preserving the body warmth during slumber. Against the abnormal frost it was imperative to cover their heads with the upper folds of these sleeping garments, as any part of the face left exposed would be frozen in a solid mask by morning. Weary with the long day's trail, the men lay motionless beside the banked-up fire.

Only two, Dunvegan and Maskwa, remained sitting upright, talking together in low tones over their plans, the crucial point of which was not far away.

"At three in the morning we break camp," the chief trader announced. "By nightfall we must be within sight of Fort Brondel. I think with a few hours' rest that we might take them by surprise in the very early dawn."

The Ojibway fort runner smoked slowly, pondering. He offered no word. Squatting squarely on his haunches, he stared at the fire with a sort of somnolent vacancy on his countenance. Yet the Indian brain was active. Beneath their glassy surface lights his eyes studied future events. When he saw things as clearly as his shrewd discernment demanded, he would speak, and not before.

"You understand, my brother," continued Dunvegan, "that it is necessary for me to succeed in my enterprise. The seizure of this fort of the French Hearts is so necessary to the Factor's whole plan that we cannot think of failure. If I accomplish the capture, he will join me after he has taken Fort Dumarge. Then, together, we propose to besiege the third, last and strongest of the Nor'west posts in our district."

Maskwa grunted noncommittally, and for an instant took the pipe from his lips.

"Fort La Roche of the French Hearts is powerful," he commented briefly.

"So powerful," supplemented Dunvegan, "that it will test even our combined forces to rush its stockades. Otherwise it is impregnable. Fort Dumarge must go, Maskwa; also Fort Brondel. The enemy's opposition must be wiped out as we proceed. Having no harassing foes at our backs, we will at the last stand an equal chance against the defenders of Fort La Roche."

"So," remarked the Ojibway. "It is a good plan, Strong Father. And should we stand inside La Roche we may see some old friends."

"That may be." The unconquered bitterness surged up in Dunvegan.

"No doubt we shall see the Wayward One, the daughter of the Stern Father."

"Yes, doubtless."

"Also Soft Eyes, the traitor, who came from over the Big Waters."

"Aye, indeed," murmured Dunvegan, "and the Factor proposes to deal with him. It will be dark dealing, I fancy, for Edwin Glyndon."

"We shall meet, too," Maskwa went on oratorically, "the wise Chief Running Wolf and his hasty son, Three Feathers."

"In the fight we may meet them, for we know Running Wolf has added his tribe's strength to that of Black Ferguson in defense of Fort La Roche."

"There at the last will we stalk the Black Ferguson in his lair," rejoiced the Ojibway. "It will be a good stalk, Strong Father. The old wolf is worthy of a hard chase. And, Strong Father, there is one other we shall see."

"Whom?"

"The Fair One. The niece of old Pierre—her that Soft Eyes took to wife."

Dunvegan winced, finding no words. Maskwa voiced something that had evolved in his facile mind.

"Strong Father is my brother," he declared, "and I have read my brother's thoughts. It was his wish to place the Fair One at his own fireside. That is still his desire, although he does not fulfill it. If Strong Father were an Indian, it would be swiftly done. Yet the Indian's ways are not the ways of the white man. He must not steal his brother's wife till that brother dies. Is it not so, Strong Father?"

"Even so, Maskwa," sighed Dunvegan, burdened by his grim thoughts.

"Then Strong Father shall have the Fair One to wife. I, Maskwa, will see when it comes to the last that Soft Eyes falls in the attack."

"No!" cried Dunvegan vehemently. "Not a prick of the skin will you give Edwin Glyndon. I warn you once. Let that stay your hand."

The Ojibway grumbled at the adjuration of restraint, for although he did not quite comprehend its moral motive, he fully understood its decisiveness.

"Be it so," he observed. "What I say is wisdom. I have also other wisdom for Strong Father."

"How?"

"I would have him enter the gates of Fort Brondel by cunning."

"Explain, Maskwa," commanded the chief trader quietly.

"In the night of tomorrow let ten men drive this Niskitowaney fur train inside the gates, the rest of the Company's servants lying in wait outside. When the gates are won, the rest is easy, Strong Father."

The chief trader turned to Maskwa with an explanation of amazement.

"By Rupert's bones, but you are bold," he cried admiringly.

"The move of the bold often wins," remarked Maskwa.

Dunvegan revolved the project mentally, getting each separate point of view.

"We'll do it," he rapped out, smashing a burnt stick-end into the coals with a force that sent fresh flames roaring up. "Maskwa, we'll do it."

"Good!" exclaimed the Ojibway, without elation. "But first we need the password of the gates. If Strong Father allows, I will get it."

He motioned to the prone, blanket-wrapped prisoners alongside the fire.

"Get it," ordered the chief trader. "But no torture, remember."

"So," promised Maskwa coolly. "I will frighten it from one of them."

He plucked the Worcester pistol out of Dunvegan's belt and went slowly up the line. Presently he singled out the spokesman of the captives lying completely muffled up in the sleeping robes. At the touch of Maskwa's toe, the Nor'wester sat erect, his blackbearded, swarthy face full of evil glints. He was one of the scum that the younger fur company had picked up to swell their none too formidable ranks.

The Ojibway squatted opposite this fellow, in whose charge the Niskitowaney fur train had been traveling.

"The password at your fort," he commanded with abruptness and vigor.

A villainous oath was the response, an epithet that would have been a vicious blow had the Nor'wester's arms been loose.

"The password!" Maskwa's voice kept even, but he stabbed the black man through with the needle points of his concerted gaze.

No response! The Ojibway brought the pistol into view and leveled it with a precision more deadly than visual concentration.

"The password!" he repeated stonily for the third time.

"Shoot and be cursed to you!" cried the Nor'wester, the swagger and braggadocio, which in his breed was a substitute for courage, breaking out.

Swift as light came Maskwa's side-twist of the hand.

Bang! The pistol's scorch stung the Nor'wester's right ear.

Bang! Its muzzle jet seared his left ear.

Bang! The round, fiendish mouth spat a white furrow through his black hair.

The awakened camp, thinking of an attack, sat up and grasped weapons, then put them furtively back, half ashamed of their mistake, and gazed wonderingly at the strange tableau.

"French Heart, the next one goes through your head," warned the Ojibway. "The password!"

The Nor'wester, staring into the deadly cylinder of steel, experienced a prickly, spreading sensation in the nerves of the forehead just between the eyes. He imagined the crashing impact of the leaden missile. He already felt the oozy bullet-hole.

Maskwa's eyes lanced him with the bloody light which the coals infused. His spirit quivered under that knife. His nerves collapsed. He pitched forward on his face, reiterating the password in choking gasps.

"Marseillaise," he panted. "Marseillaise."

The Ojibway tossed the man's sleeping robes over his fear-shaken visage. Abruptly he stalked back and dropped the pistol in Dunvegan's lap.

"You have heard, Strong Father?" he asked. "It is good. He spoke the truth, because he dared not lie. In the night of tomorrow we will enter the gates of the fort of the French Hearts with that password. I have spoken."

Like a snake Maskwa slid into his fur blankets. Dunvegan followed, and the whole camp was soon still.

Gradually the banked logs of the fire broke in little falling rifts of coals. Uncombated, the frost advanced and screened the red glow with a gray hand. Across the valley of the Blazing Pine came the howling of wolves. Then of a sudden the winter aurora leaped out of the north, sweeping majestically from stars to earth-line.

No rustling sound such as is heard within the arctic circle accompanied its movement. It came and vanished in mystic silence, only to reappear with twofold brilliance and multitudinous variations of hue. Up in the zenith a corona of dazzling splendor formed, and the miracle, continuing, left pulsating, nebulous rays walking the far-off, frozen shores.

The immensity of the wilderness

reached gave field for unlimited display. Flooded with resplendent light, the primal wastes of snow reflected every glorious cloud, every celestial flash. As a monstrous mirror to augment the radiance and multiply the lambent gleams, the speckless crust stretched on and on. The very earth seemed to acquire motion and to roll its snows in red and white undulating waves.

Wrapped in the sleep of utter weariness, lost to the hard facts of life, the sleepers lay in a realm of mysticism, of phantasmagoria. Thus all night across the world blazed this carnival of flame.

CHAPTER XI

A DOUBLE SURPRISE

"*Arrétez!*" The sentinel's challenge from the gates of Fort Brondel rang out sharply in the near-dawn.

Through the blinding smother of great, soft-falling snowflakes he had heard rather than seen the advance of a dog train toiling up the rising ground upon which the post was situated. It came, he thought, as a Nor'west train would come, making no unnecessary clamor but without any pretense at secrecy. The storm-laden air choked the first cry of the watchman, preventing it from reaching the clogged ears of the approaching party. Again his hail was lifted up.

"*Hola, Arrétez!*" he commanded, the strident tone cutting the snow.

Instantly the leading team pulled up. The others lined behind it. Brondel's sentinel could discern five bulky sledges, each accompanied by a driver and a guard with rifle on shoulder. Their faces and garments plastered thickly by moist flakes, the men looked like tall, white stumps suddenly moved out of the forest and set before the stockades. Identities were impossibly vague in the storm and in the gray dark which preceded the morning.

"*Qui vive?*" asked the keeper of the post gate, doubtfully.

"The Niskitowaney fur train," answered the muffled voice of one of the half-breeds who drove.

"The password?"

"Marseillaise."

The gate bars rattled with release; a gap yawned in the stockade.

"*Entrez,*" came the permission.

Walking with the leading sledge, Maskwa whirled as he passed the sentinel and felled him with a quick blow of the rifle butt. Quickly he removed the unconscious man's weapons and threw him on the sled.

"Strong Father, the thing is easy, as I told you," the Ojibway muttered to the first snow-coated giant guard, who was in reality Bruce Dunvegan.

"Too easy," was Bruce's answer. "Listen. There is no stir about the buildings, no sound. That puzzles me, Maskwa."

"Men sleep soundest just before the light breaks," explained the fort runner in a tone of satisfaction.

"Perhaps." Dunvegan's tone was doubtful.

As they stood in the palisade entrance, listening keenly for any cry which would mean their discovery, the pulses of the Hudson's Bay men surged faster and faster. The cold chill of the storm-beaten atmosphere changed suddenly to an electric glow. The fever of waiting strain flushed their bodies. They began to breathe hard and to shift weapons from left hands to armpits and back again.

But no clamor beat out of the post structures; a ghostly blur they lay, walled round with gigantic drifts. The only vibration which communicated itself to the ear was the velvet brushing of falling snow against the high stockades.

Faces turned in the direction whence they had come, the ten figures with the dog teams remained poised in perfect silence, anxious, eager, expectant. Then,

quite near, the wilderness voice they awaited spoke out abruptly.

"Yir—r—r—ee—ee—ee!" echoed the weird, panicky screech of a lynx.

Maskwa curved his hands about his mouth and replied with the horned owl's full-throated whoop.

"Kee—yoo—oo—oo—oo!" he quavered in a quick, ever-diminishing tremolo.

At the pre-arranged signal the rest of the Oxford House force moved swiftly up and passed through Fort Brondel's guardless gate. Two Indians had been left with the bound prisoners and the Nor'west sledge teams in the fringe of the timber.

"Are you ready, men?" Dunvegan asked.

"Aye, aye, sir," cried Connear. "This is what we have all been waiting for."

To the chief trader it was an incredible thing that they reached the buildings in the center of the yard without any alarm being raised. The *giddés* whined. Instantly a howling response arose from the quarters where the fort dogs were kept. Gripping their arms tightly, the invaders waited for the uproar that should follow the huskies' wailing and for the man-to-man struggle which must succeed the awakening of the post.

No uproar came. The expected onslaught failed to materialize.

Even Maskwa became mystified.

"Strong Father," he whispered, "this is beyond my wisdom."

"And mine," admitted Dunvegan, worried as well as puzzled by the utter lack of the expected developments.

"Can the post be deserted? Have they had warning and fled?"

"No! In case of warning the stockades would have been lined with fighters. There is something extraordinarily wrong about the place. A sentinel isn't set in a deserted fort, you know. And yet, why is there no sign of life? Maskwa, it's uncanny."

Although totally unfamiliar with the ground and the plan of Fort Brondel, Dunvegan decided to investigate without delay. He pressed open the door of the dark building in front of him, the latch offering no resistance.

"Come," he ordered. "If any man is clumsy enough to make a noise, let him stay outside."

Within the silent room, Dunvegan drew a candle-end and a match from his inner pocket and struck a light. The faint beams showed that he was in the store of the Northwest Fur Company's post. Shelves held neat arrays of goods; orderly piles of bales and boxes were ranged about the walls; but no person could be seen.

As many men as the store was capable of accommodating crowded after Dunvegan. In their shoepacks they walked soft-footed as panthers.

"These French Hearts must sleep as the dead," murmured Maskwa.

"Yes, or else they hide somewhere to shoot the half of us down at a stroke," the chief trader returned.

He lighted a fresh candle taken from a shelf. Its larger glimmer projected giant shadows of the men upon the farther end of the store. The huge silhouettes loomed up with a mysterious vagueness suggestive of the advent of the real human figures. Dunvegan's followers passed their own surmises to each other in low, husky whispers, remarking on such a chance as their leader had recognized.

"If they are hiding in order to get to close quarters," observed Connear, "they'll be sorry in the end. For we can hit in a clinch as well as they can. Eh, Terence Burke?"

"Yes, me enemy," muttered the vigorous-minded Irishman, whom no strange situation could abash, "an if it's thim same Donnybrook Fair tricks they're after, they'll find me rifle butt makes a mighty foine blackthorn."

Baptiste Verenne spoke to Black Fox, the Salteaux Indian, in a soft aside.

"Black Fox, you be son of beeg medicine-mans," he whispered. "Mebbe you be tell us w'at dis mean. Spik de wise word an' say w'd de Nor'westaires don' joomp out for keel us queeck."

But the Salteaux shook his head.

"The French Hearts are fools and snakes," he replied. "Their ways are dark as the ways of evil spirits. Therefore they cannot be read."

"Dat mooch I be know, me," confided Baptiste.

Numerous whispers were making a very audible rustle. Bruce Dunvegan held up his hand for silence. He began to examine what lay beyond the other two of the three doors of the store.

Throwing open the one on the right, his candle gleam flashed across a large, empty floor. According to the custom of new forts built purely for aggressive purposes, Dunvegan judged that store, blockhouse and trading room adjoined or were connected by passages. This section, he presumed, was the blockhouse.

A hasty survey proved his conclusion correct. The light played round the rough walls, revealing weapons, trophies of the chase and the various equipments used in wilderness life throughout the different seasons. But like the store, the blockhouse was without occupants of any kind.

Dunvegan made a quick decision and gave a quicker order.

"Bring lights," was his command. "Let half your number hold the blockhouse and half occupy the store. It will take an army of Nor'westers to put us out now."

Immediately the chief trader's directions were carried out. The men assigned themselves promptly in equal bodies to both buildings.

There remained the trading-room and the factor's quarters to search. Dunvegan concluded that there was no separate house for the factor of the post, because a stairway led up through the store ceiling. He surmised that the residential apartments of the one in command of Fort Brondel lay above. Gently he opened the door in the left-hand wall of the store and saw a long, gloomy passageway.

"No light," Bruce commented. "Nothing there either, it seems."

He closed the door again and set foot on the stairs.

"Guard those entrances well," was his adjuration. "Don't stir unless you get a signal from me. I'm going up to awaken the lord of Fort Brondel, whoever he may be, and let him know that he is a prisoner of the Hudson's Bay Company."

Slowly Dunvegan ascended the stairway and reached the upper floor. He still had the candle in his hand, its pale flame revealing a sort of living-room which held a table, a stove, chairs, shelves of books, a lounge covered with fur robes, a large, wooden cupboard, a pair of leather-padded stools, a writing desk in the corner. The furnishings were plain, though comfortable; they seemed such as any hard-working factor might possess.

Treading softly, the chief trader crossed to the door at the other end and pushed on it. It remained fast, bolted inside. He put his ear to the wood. No sound.

Dunvegan stepped back a stride. Rising with a swift movement on the toes of his left foot, he planted the right sole flatly against the door with a straight, powerful body jolt. There came the crunching noise of metal tearing through hard wood, and the barrier swung back, trembling on its hinges.

Instantly the wind of suction puffed out the candle. Bruce smothered a low exclamation. Stepping cautiously to the side of the jamb beyond the range of any sudden missile which might be sent through the open doorway, he fumbled in his pockets for a match. He scratched it hurriedly against the wall, his eyes searching the gloom for a sign of the

sleeper whom he must have awakened. He dabbed the match to the wick and gazed more eagerly.

But no figure launched from the blackness beyond the threshold; there arose not even a rustle to show that some one's slumber had been broken. To the listening Dunvegan there was something weird in this circumstance. He wondered if he should find the sleeping chamber as he had found the store and the blockhouse—empty.

His pondering, like his hesitation, occupied only a second. The air of uncertainty left a tinge of suspense which Bruce hastened to dispel. Feeling some subtle magnetism, some unaccountable sensation of a familiar presence, some tremendous unknown climax which his heart acknowledged blindly, he strode abruptly into the dark apartment, his one hand holding the light well to one side, the other clasping the weapon in his belt.

"Another step, you beast, and husband or no husband, I'll kill you."

Bitter as acid was the woman's voice which hurled the threat. Across the flickering candle rays Dunvegan's startled glance met a leveled pistol and beyond that the beautiful, defiant eyes of Desirée Lazard.

The unintelligible cry rising within him choked in his dry throat. He gasped and trembled, causing the white light to play over bedstead, coverlet, and the loose-frocked figure crouching behind. His physical courage and indomitable will, sufficient to face the fierce Nor'westers within the walls of their stronghold, was displaced by a nerveless weakness that banished self-control.

"One more step," she warned, marking his restless muscular twitching. "I mean it."

Dunvegan's mind was battling chaotically with amazement at Desirée's presence, with wonder at her attitude, with a thousand conflicting emotions, each inspired by some swift-passing thought. Joy, doubt, jealousy, malice, love, judgment, forgiveness—these all mingled, held momentary sway, separated one by one and disappeared. Out of this chaos of human feeling Bruce retained no reigning passion. Wisely he let the hot mixture of mad ideas spend itself and give way to his usual cool reserve. Therein rested his salvation.

He still held the candle to one side, and his face was not clear. Even his figure remained shadowy in the sputtering gleam. That, he knew, accounted for Desirée mistaking him for her husband.

Now deliberately and with a steady hand he moved his light to the front so that its glimmer yellowed his wind-tanned face.

"Bruce!" Her voice was pitched in the unnatural, hysterical scream of a person struggling with a nightmare.

The sense of the dramatic leaped through the blood of both. Dunvegan glowed with the hectic pulse of old desire, but his cold reserve was maintained by a nerve-wrenching effort.

"You're not dreaming," he ventured in a measured tone. "I'm a strict reality, although an intruding one."

At the sound of his voice Desirée dropped her loaded pistol on the bed. Her tense body shivered, as if at escape from menace or danger. She covered her face with her hands. The full bosom worked in a paroxysm of sobs.

Dunvegan set the candle on a near-by stool and leaned back with folded arms against the door jamb. Thus he could control himself better, for Desirée's weeping tore his fibers. Irrelevantly he noted that she was not prepared for slumber, but wore a flowing, open-throated day dress. This fact added to Bruce's mystification.

Presently Desirée glanced up, an expression of fear succeeding the despair in her face. She rushed swiftly across the chamber to Dunvegan, her hands extended appealingly.

"Go," she pleaded. "Go before some one hears you. How you learned, how you got here is nothing. Only go. Do you know what danger you stand in?"

"No," Bruce answered grimly. "I am not aware of any."

"Are you mad?" she cried earnestly, tempestuously. "You enter a Nor'west fort. You force in the door of the Factor's apartment. And why? How did you find out I was here—and alone?"

"I didn't find out. Till two minutes ago I thought you were in Fort La Roche."

"La Roche!" she echoed with astonishment. "Why there?"

"According to Black Ferguson's plan as I read it."

Desirée looked searchingly at him.

"What do you know?"

"I know, first, that Black Ferguson was informed by Gaspard Follet of your favoring Glyndon; second, that the clerk was approached through Follet and bribed to join the Nor'west ranks with his wife; third, that the foregoing was but a design of Black Ferguson to get you beyond the stockades of Oxford House and in a place where he could lay hands on you."

"But he can't," protested Desirée.

"Can't!" Dunvegan exploded. The tone of the one word was eloquent conviction. He added: "It is well that I have arrived in time."

"Oh! no," she cried, the fear for his safety, momentarily forgotten, returning. "You must leave instantly. I will lead you down in silence."

Her hand was throbbing on his arm, her hot breath beating up against his cheeks.

"There is no need," he returned. "I shall not stir from here."

"You are in Fort Brondel," Desirée announced severely. "A Nor'west fort—"

"Your pardon," Dunvegan interrupted. "A Hudson's Bay fort."

"Now you are surely mad."

"Mad enough to have taken this post. I command forty-odd men in the rooms below."

Incredulity widened Desirée's eyes.

"We—of the post?" she stammered.

"Taken, too. The men become my prisoners—when I find them. You also are a captive."

"Thank God," Desirée cried.

It was Bruce's turn for bewilderment.

"What talk!" he exclaimed. "Prisoners don't generally rejoice. Yet this post seems the place of riddles to-night. Oddest of all to me is the fact that I have met with no opposition—except from yourself."

He smiled, bowing courteously. Desirée smiled too, wanly.

"Come," she suggested, "I will show you why."

Taking the candle, she led the way across the living room, down the stairs and through the great store which belonged to the Northwest Fur Company. Under the wondering gaze of the men they passed and entered the passage into which Bruce Dunvegan had glanced before. This passageway extended for many paces. A closed door stopped their progress at the farther end. Desirée laid her finger tips against it.

"The garrison of Fort Brondel is in there," she murmured.

"The trading room?"

"Yes."

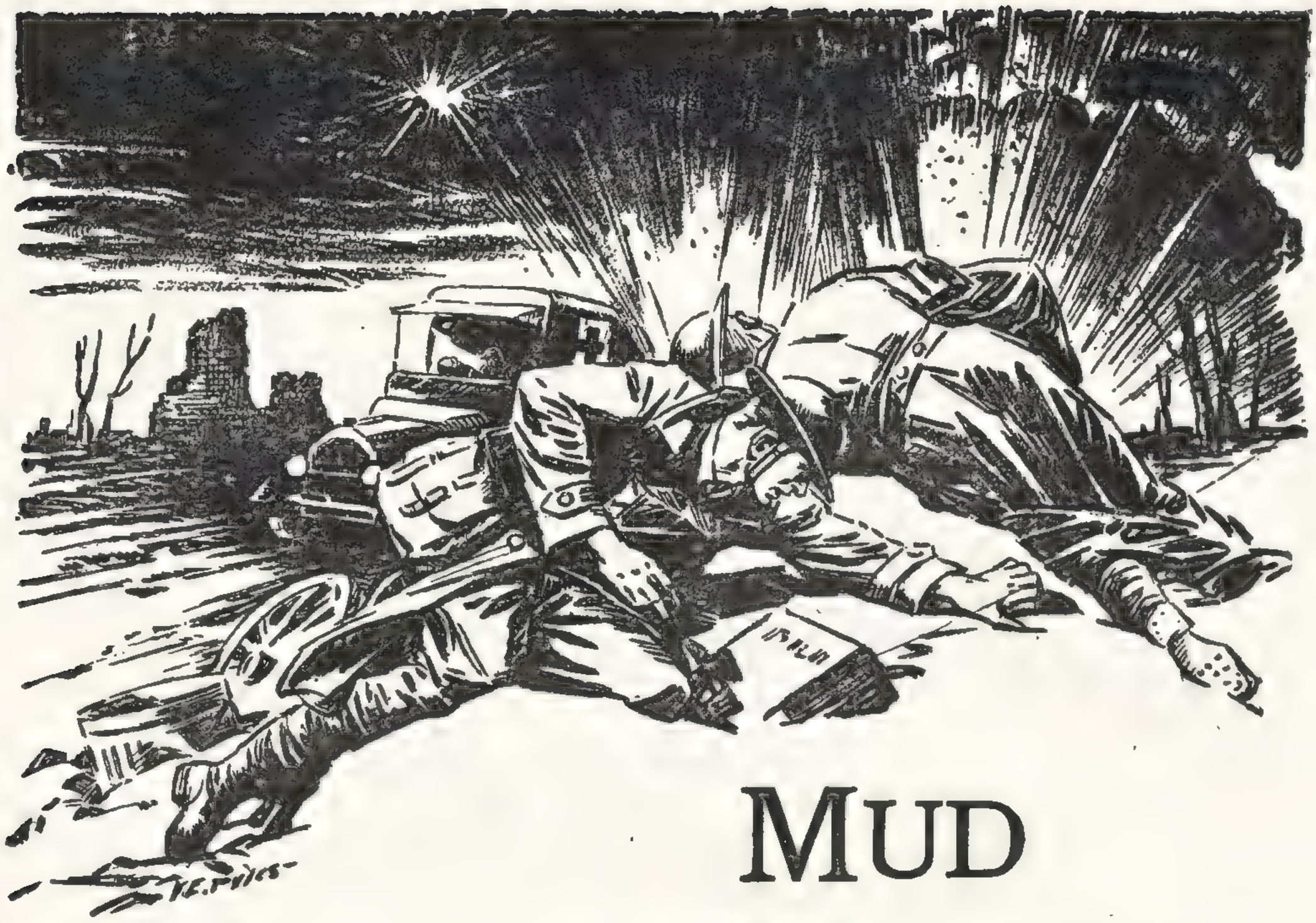
"I had better call my fighters. And you? Wouldn't it be well for you to go back? There may be violence and—"

"No necessity whatever," Desirée interrupted cynically. "They will not strike a blow. I can vouch for that."

An instant she paused, as if summoning her will-power to do a hateful thing. Then she swung the door sharply back and held the light inside.

"Look!" she commanded with bitter irony.

(To Be Concluded.)



MUD

By HENRY F. CHURCH

THE lieutenant sat in the autumn rain by the sloppy trough that had been a road, his back propped against a shattered tree trunk, his feet ankle deep in the black mud of France. From time to time he spat blood and cursed his general discomfiture, thinking of the foolish rhyme which has to do with a fisherman's luck. In addition to the dull hurt of his wound, his stomach craved food and his posterior section—there being no tail to his raincoat—was wet and cold.

The enemy was to blame for the wound, the commissary for his hunger; but he, himself, was responsible for the mutilated raincoat. The idea of cutting off its tail to make a waterproof hood for his automatic had not been so hot, now that he had time for reflection. His was a diversified grouch.

But behind it all was the mud. It seethed on every side, a noxious, clammy sea slapped against the horizon. It sucked at his shoes, and when he pulled his feet out it dragged back, and he felt the ache up his legs, which were beginning to tremble. The lieutenant had been fighting it for a long time. He was angered by its sight and disgusted at its smell and sick to death at its greedy immensity.

He pulled back the cuff of his coat and looked at the two watches strapped to his left wrist,—as signal officer, charged with coördinating the regimental time, he rated three, and the third was in his pocket—one watch had stopped and the other showed the time to be five-thirty P.M. When last he had looked at it the hour had been eight A.M. Nine hours and a half and no room yet on the ambulances, which were plowing past with the regularity of scheduled taxies. He drew the sodden raincoat about him and spat more blood.

"How does one get out of here, soldier?" a crisp voice barked in his ear. He knew by its peremptory tone that it belonged either to a general or a second lieutenant, or at least to a major. Colonels and captains, he had found,

were more companionable. The slight to his rank he ignored, knowing that his enlisted man's uniform—donned for protective purposes—hid, under its thick shoulder straps, the tarnished bars of his insignia. The voice repeated its question more crisply.

"Oh, one takes one's handkerchief and ties it on a stick, like a flag of truce, and rams it in the mud—damn the stuff! —and if there's a seat aboard, the driver picks one up. But really reservation should be made. I've been here all day."

The mild sarcasm was lost on the newcomer, who immediately proceeded to tie his signal to a trench cane and set it solidly in the mud. The lieutenant bristled at the sight.

"Isn't that a signal ground cloth?" he asked sharply, and his new companion, somewhat surprised at the brusqueness of the question, admitted that it was.

"And you using it for a handkerchief! No wonder the planes can't pick out troop positions, when every small ground cloth we have is grabbed off for handkerchiefs, dish towels, or diapers!" He spat blood again and, with closed eyes, lapsed into silence, resting his back against the shattered trunk.

THE new arrival surveyed the lieutenant more closely and saw his bars, green with gas corrosion, peeping from beneath the shoulder straps.

"I'm Major Fitzmaurice, of the 3rd Battalion, —th Infantry," he informed pompously and waited for the galvanizing effect of the announcement. None came.

"I am—or was—the regimental signal officer of that outfit," said the lieutenant indifferently. "I don't recall you."

The major was slightly nonplussed. "Er—I'm just up. They sent for me hurriedly, yesterday. Bumped this morning with an H. E. Rather quick service. Are you wounded?"

The lieutenant opened his eyes at the fatuity of the remark. He was inspired to ask the major what the hell he thought he was sitting there in the mud for, but on second thought he decided not to waste his precious breath.

"Naturally," he stated wearily and again retired into silence.

"Got me in the arm—the left arm!" informed the major removing that member from an improvised sling and waving it in a circle. The lieutenant turned a jaundiced eye on the sling.

"Another ground cloth!" he grunted. The major reddened.

A passing ambulance, packed to the rear step with muddy men, turned in from the road fork with a sickening skid and splashed the major's immaculate signal with mud; he noted that the limp rag which hung from the lieutenant's twig was entirely covered with the substance, mutely denoting the passing of many such vehicles.

"Say, do you suppose we will have to sit here all night?" he inquired of his junior. Then, upon receiving no answer: "Smoke?"

The lieutenant took the proffered cigarette with a nod, and as the major extended his lighter he saw the red from the former's lips seep into the paper.

"Oh, I say, they must have got you badly!" exclaimed the major with genuine concern, forgetting for the moment the scratch on his own shoulder.

" 'Tis neither as deep as a well, nor as wide as a gate, but 'tis enough!" misquoted the lieutenant and grinned, but the smoke strangled him and the red stain on the cigarette spread. He removed it from his lips and held it between white fingers, causing the major to be reminded of a girl in Paris who was wont to hold a cigarette in this same lanquid manner, its end stained with her scarlet lipstick. The major shuddered and wished to God that he was back in Paris in her company.

The man with the lung wound went into a paroxysm of coughing which splat-

tered blood on the major's coat, and then, when the latter was sure that it was the end of him, came sharply out of it. Opening his musette bag, he produced a half-filled cognac bottle and reduced its contents to a quarter.

"Last of four of 'em!" said the lieutenant ruefully, passing the bottle to his senior; but the major was a fastidious soul and refused on the perfectly good ground that the lieutenant needed it more than did he. The drink bucked up the wounded man and he became quite civil.

"There's a receiving station about a mile down the road, if they haven't blown it out," he told the major. "I was on my way back there this morning, on a stretcher, when my bearers got bogged down and I found it easier going to hike. I saw ambulances hitting in here from that road fork yonder and thought that my best bet would be to stick around, but I've drawn only blanks so far. Perhaps the major had better go on and take a chance at the station. It should be a junction for other ambulances." Then, after a moment of silence: "The front must have moved up. There's been less shelling along here since noon."

"Perhaps I can help you along," offered the major, and thought that the picture of his arrival, lugging in his wounded junior, would be a heroic one. Maybe they would give him the D.S.C. or, at least, the *Croix de Guerre*.

"*Par de que*," said the lieutenant with a shrug. "I'll stop one of those lizzies when it gets dark. I've a Very pistol in my kick and I'll shoot a red light at 'em."

THE Major sat down and made himself comfortable as possible, leaning against a bulky object that seemed to him to be a discarded bedding roll. He began to consider his own case. What if the receiving station had really been blown out or changed location? It would be better sitting here with this self-contained junior then stumbling around in the dark on his own.

His casual departure from his battalion P. C., that morning, when a fragment of a lone, searching shell had nicked him in the shoulder, now began to take on a new aspect. What if his battalion, so snugly in position when he had left, had advanced during his absence? He supposed he would have a difficult time explaining to the colonel that he had struck out for the rear without the formality of medical advice in the matter.

The major cocked an anxious ear to the direction of the front and was alarmed at the faintness of the sound of firearms. Evidently, as the lieutenant had stated, the front had moved up.

"Say," he admitted, "I'm rather new at this sort of thing. Does one have to have a tag or other credential to get to the rear?"

"They label you at the dressing station," informed the lieutenant, pointing to a soggy green card tied to a button of his coat. The rain had washed off any medical notation it may have carried, but the bloody froth on his lips was credential enough in his case.

"H'mmm," mused the major and puckered his brow. "Perhaps it would have been more in keeping with routine had I stopped at the dressing station. By the way, have you noticed that this road is comparatively free from traffic? Just what can that mean?"

"Means the fight has shifted up the line, maybe. Might mean almost anything. But traffic—except ambulances—stopped on this road long ago. The last thing that passed here, going up, was a water cart about noon. A shell hit the mule in the middle of the back and unharnessed him. The driver was blown over into that field yonder and lost an eye." The lieutenant fortified himself with another drink and studied the major's face. "Lots of guts, that driver.

He passed me holding his eye in and I told him that the receiving station was supposed to be somewhere down the road. 'Hell,' he told me. 'I'm not looking for a receiving station. I'm going back for another mule!' "

"Marvelous pluck!" commented the major softly. "And did he get the mule?"

The lieutenant shook his head. "No. He cashed in a few minutes later. Bled to death, I reckon. He's right there back of you. You've been leaning on him for the past five minutes."

The major got up with alacrity. He was suddenly sick at his stomach and the war was very real for him at the moment, but he managed in time to achieve a casualness of tone which may or may not have fooled the lieutenant.

"Well, I guess I'll be getting back," he remarked, and started to retrieve his steps through the clinging mud. The junior officer thought that he must be confused as to direction and called to him that the receiving station lay behind him.

"Yes, yes, I know!" flung back the major through chattering teeth and slushed off up the road. The heavy detonation of guns was to be heard now in growing volume, the sound trapped in the downpour and magnified a hundredfold as it roared across the ruined countryside. The lieutenant noted that the major, after a moment of hesitation, left the road and marched off in the direction of the firing.

"So long,—buddy," called the lieutenant as the dusk swallowed up the stiffly marching figure.

A SHELL came whining and plastered the lieutenant with a coating of the despised mud, and then another and another, marching down the road with uncanny precision until the earth rocked and the air throbbed like a pulsing tide. The lieutenant crawled over and lay behind the silent driver, hugging him closely for protection from the rain of steel fragments and mud. Here he stayed until the fury subsided; then, hearing the labored approach of an ambulance over at the road fork, he crawled out and loosed a red flare from his Very pistol.

The ambulance stopped and its driver came warily forward to investigate. Up to his calves in mud, he looked small and gnome-like as he stood pondering the problem of an extra passenger.

"Any dead ones on board?" he called to the ambulance, and a cheery voice answered: "Check one!"

"Make room!" barked the driver and his order was followed shortly by a dull plop in the mud. "O.K., feller, let's roll," he barked again and jerked a directing thumb over his shoulder. The lieutenant, on grateful impulse, gave him the remnant of the cognac.

"Hell, I'm a Baptist!" grumbled the driver indignantly, but rammed the bottle into his pocket, nevertheless.

Squeezed into the crowded vehicle, the lieutenant found the air heavy with the odor of unwashed humanity. Someone struck light to a cigarette butt and the driver cursed him roundly through the small opening at the back of the cab. The light went out but not before the picture of haggard, muddy faces had fixed itself in the lieutenant's memory.

Young, unshaven faces, swathed in bandages, or stained with iodine applied to open wounds; here a sleeveless, bleeding arm; a form racked with the slow strangulation of gas. Playboys entered into a game which had proved too rough for them, he thought. Sudden anger welled up within him, not against the physical agony that had been visited upon them, but at the eternal mud which plastered every form.

The ambulance plunged into a shallow shell hole and stopped, tumbling them into a groaning mass. Presently it was untangled by the driver who, swearing as no good Baptist should swear, ordered them out to the roadside while, with much snorting and back-fir-

ing, the sturdy little vehicle backed out of the trap. Fifteen men had come out to shiver in the downpour and thirteen climbed back to take up the plunging journey.

"More room for youse guys," remarked the driver tersely and dragged the two bodies off the road, after stooping to convince himself that there was no further need to haul them. The lieutenant, who now had an end seat where the air was better, noted that the driver carried two crumpled cigarette packages in his hand. He could see this plainly because the driver brazenly paused to light a cigarette, pondering a moment on which of the brands was more suitable to his taste.

"Why don't you practice what you preach, you—?" growled a voice from the ambulance and the driver grinned in the flickering light and went forward to resume his seat.

More miles of slipping and sliding on the main ribbon of mud, dodging into detours, doubling at times on their own tracks, then a long drawn whine followed by a violent crash sent them huddling together. The lieutenant on his end seat was engulfed with a tenacious coating of liquid soil as the ambulance rocked under the concussion. With a shrieking of brakes it came to a stop at the side of the road.

This time no grumbling driver climbed out to herd them. After a brief wait the lieutenant and a soldier who rode the step climbed down in the mud. They found the driver slumped in his seat, one of the pilfered cigarettes yet glowing between his set teeth. The lieutenant was impressed with the consideration the driver had shown in stopping his car when he had known that death had him.

"Can you drive?" asked the lieutenant.

"Nope," said the man from the step. Between them they eased the late driver over to make room for the lieutenant, who was sick of the interrupted journey and determined now to push through.

"Let's go fifty-fifty on his fags," offered the soldier, but the lieutenant was not interested in the proposition. He was methodically engaged in locating the several operating gadgets.

"Hot damn!" exclaimed the soldier. "He's heeled with a bottle!"

"You can leave that," informed the lieutenant, pocketing his late gift; but as soon as his disappointed companion had returned to the rear step he emptied the bottle and took up his task.

THE ride that followed is recorded in the War Department in a glowing tribute of thirty words—one each for the years that it took the lieutenant to complete it. According to the citation, he brought in, while desperately hurt, a load of wounded companions, skillfully fleeing a rolling barrage that tore up the road in their wake. But the lieutenant, unmindful of the cargo he carried, was fleeing not shells but the awful wall of mud that he felt must engulf him.

Once he lost consciousness for a moment; the lurching skid of his vehicle brought him back to his senses and rewarded him with indignant howls from his passengers. After that he stayed awake. He thought that he must have traversed the whole of France when, at long last, lights flared ahead of him and he knew from the sounds and the smells that he had reached the evacuation hospital and with it the end of his drive.

He fell asleep at the wheel and it was not until a haggard officer reprimanded him for not getting back to his haul that he remembered that he was a patient and climbed down. The officer, muttering apologies, escorted him to a long line of waiting men and wedged him in near its head.

The smell of ether filled the air and there was a shuddering undertone of groaning from a building that flanked them, but the badinage and laughter that broke out from time to time in the

disheveled ranks was heartening. He felt a thrill of pride that he was one with so plucky and carefree a crew. However, the line moved slowly. After awhile he became very tired. The foolish rhyme about the fisherman's luck was running with such persistent monotony through his fagged brain that he decided that sleep would be his best refuge, whereupon he quit the waiting line; calling a temporary truce with his enemy, the mud, he flopped down and slept in its moist embrace.

SEEMINGLY over centuries the hospital train crawled toward the interior, while the lieutenant shivered under a single army blanket and complained profanely of the cold and the carelessness of those who had left the former occupant of the blanket too long in its folds. Near him, in thin piping tones, someone also complained of the cold. Then the owner of the querulous voice called shrilly for his mother and there were groping, ponderous forms fumbling at the man's side, after which the lieutenant felt the grateful warmth of an extra blanket.

When next he opened his eyes he blinked in a flood of early morning sunlight. Outside an army of doctors and nurses were bustling about and giving confused but well-meant orders to awestruck attendants in contact for the first time with wounded from the front.

"What place is this?" asked the lieutenant hopefully, thinking that this eternity of travel must have at last brought him home. "Allery," he was told, but the name meant nothing. In months to come many thousands of his fellow patriots, as yet untouched by steel or gas, were to occupy the beds of this great base hospital and fill to capacity, the little burial ground that flanked its western confines. The name of Allery would be seared in his memory as a symbol of ultimate monotony, but for the time it meant nothing.

To his astonishment the great blanket of mud was gone. In its place were fields of grass, silver white with frost. Gone was the grumbling of the big guns; birds fluttered in the morning calm.

The endless rows of neat hospital barracks suddenly gave him a new perspective on the war. This was a far cry from a battalion dressing station, hurriedly set up in the mud, or a field hospital thrust close under the lee of a quaking chalk cliff—incidentals to a tremendous moment.

Finally he felt the cleansing warmth of hot water and castile soap and then the cooling caress of cotton sheets. New dressings were had for his wound and an encouraging pat from a white-haired surgeon. He marveled at the prodigal handing out of attention and recalled a previous trip, which had sent him for three sweltering weeks to lie on a blanket-spread cot in a field hospital, where no one had wasted soap and warm water on him and where the busy, haggard doctors had small time for kindly conversation.

A stout orderly, pop-eyed with the stupendous weight of a new responsibility, brought him a cup of good American coffee and he consumed it thankfully. The lieutenant thought it only polite to comment on the cleanliness of his surroundings and the orderly announced that things ought to be clean, as this was the first consignment of wounded they had received.

"We got two thousand in from the Argonne this morning," he confided and then, in an aggrieved tone, complained that this load had come at a most inopportune time, seeing that an inspection group of big boys were coming.

"Where is my uniform, and my shoes, and my gat?" demanded the lieutenant, reacting to the mention of an inspection.

"One of the doctors got your gun, I reckon," informed the orderly. "We're sort of short on side arms, but your clothes and other junk will be back soon

from the delouser and we'll bag 'em up and save 'em for you. We know how."

"Apparently!" commented the lieutenant, thinking of his beloved automatic and the tail of his raincoat that he had sacrificed to keep it in working order. "But, just as a friendly hint, you tell your crowd I signed up for that so-called junk and I want it right where I can see it." The orderly, impressed with the glint in his eyes, promised that he would do the best he could about it.

The new-found comfort was too much for the lieutenant and he could not sleep when night came on. A nurse became alarmed at his fixed stare and called a doctor, who ordered an opiate; then he slept for thirty-six hours and plumb into the midst of the expected inspection.

"THIS is the man, General," a voice was explaining. "A bad case, but he has a fighting chance." The lieutenant thought that the general had come to charge him with the offense of mutilating government property.

"I'll pay for it!" he told them in the peeved tone of a very sick man confronted with an annoying trifle. "I'll put it on W.D.A.G.O. form 36: 'One raincoat, minus one tail.' Now do go away and let me sleep!"

The general came over and sat by the lieutenant's bed and took his hand. He believed the lieutenant to be delirious.

"My boy," he began in fatherly fashion, "no one is bothered about your tailless raincoat. I've just learned that you are a hero—an outstanding hero, suh!"

The lieutenant, who hailed from Georgia, opened one eye in appreciation of that broadly slurred "suh". It suddenly occurred to him that generals sometimes hailed from the South, and the sound of a kindred speech warmed him. The general continued:

"The driving in of that ambulance over a shell-swept road—and you with a hole in your lung—was heroism far beyond the call of duty. You will be rewarded. There was a colonel aboard that ambulance, my lad, and he has already sent in a recommendation for you."

"Say, where's my gat?" asked the lieutenant, remembering. "It had the tail of my raincoat wrapped around it."

"Right here, Lieutenant," informed a medical officer. "Right here with your uniform and your shoes."

The lieutenant was not to be fooled with soft words. He propped himself up on an elbow and surveyed his belongings. The automatic lay there on the table, safely encased in its fragment of raincoat; his Sam Brown belt, that he had worn under his coat for safe keeping, lay beside it, broke in crisp sections from the cooking it had received. His uniform, shrunk several sizes too small for him, hung over a chair.

An uneasy thought was shaping in his head. Reaching out a feeble talon to steady himself on the general's knee, he anxiously searched the floor for his shoes. Yes, there they were, just as he had expected, two shapeless lumps of dried mud!

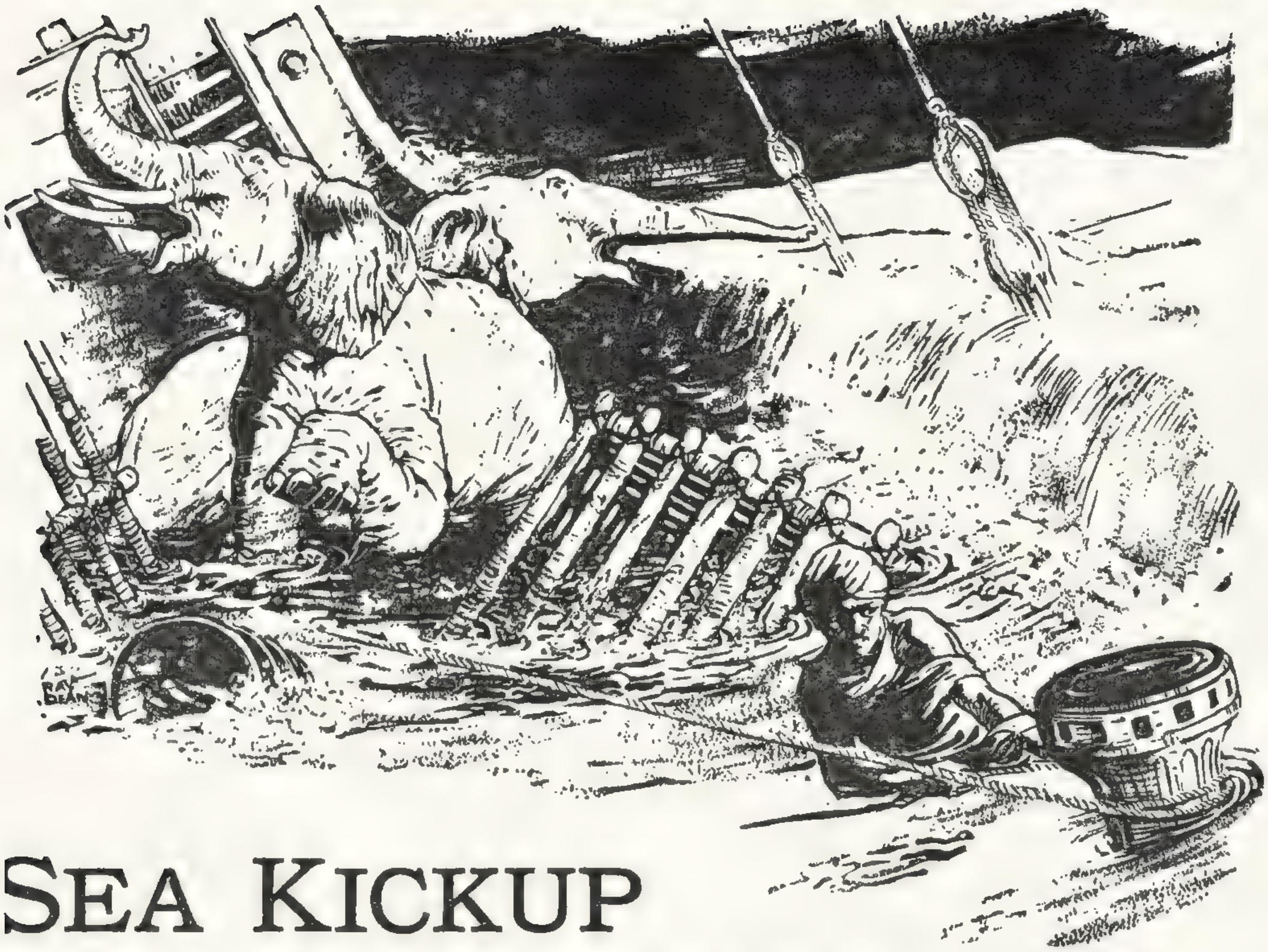
The general was talking on and on . . . . "And as I was saying, my boy, the country can't do too much for men of your type. If I, as its humble servant, can personally do anything for you—within reason, of course—you have but to ask and I promise you that it will be done!" . . . . and so on and on.

The lieutenant eased himself back in bed and the general, mistaking his expression of disgust for distress, leaned over to catch his muttered words.

"General," asked the lieutenant weakly, "it's true, isn't it, that when you give an order that all the way down the line they snap to it?"

"Quite true, my boy!"

"Then order somebody to clean the damn mud off my shoes!" pleaded the lieutenant.



SEA KICKUP ELEPHANTS

BY CLAUDE W. BOSTOCK

of the circus and menagerie family. [A Fact Story]

WE CABLED to Raji, our Singapore representative, that we had sold the elephants, tigers, and other animals, which he held for us there, to a show in America, and that they must be delivered before the opening of the circus season. He replied:

SINGAPORE, S. S.
BOSTOCK,
LONDON, ENG.
NO GO AMERICA GOTTA SMALL JAP HOYO SAN GO LONDON COME TIME.

RAJI

To most people the message might be as mysterious as the hieroglyphics on a Babylonian tomb. It meant to us that, contrary to our original plan to ship the animals via San Francisco, we now would have to ship them to London, then transhipp them to New York. It was an unfortunate change and involved hazards, particularly because winter had set in.

Raji was faithful, and we took for granted that the small Japanese vessel, the *Hoyo San,* was the best ship available. Raji knew that wild animals are poor sailors. They are seriously affected by the changes in climate, diet, inconveniences and noises; they suffer their greatest mortality on shipboard.

The obvious course was to insure the animals in transit. But the insurance companies that regularly handled these risks were charging excessive rates, and our profits would have been almost nothing, with the change in route. Something had to be done. Perhaps we could find an insurance company that would give us more reasonable rates.

We learned of a company, with a gold-lettered sign reading *Livestock Insurance, Ltd., Established 1790.* We entered. If there was any business being transacted it certainly was not apparent. There were no telephones ringing, or typewriters clicking. Evidently they did not use the latter, for in one corner a clerk, dressed in a frock coat, was making copies of a handwritten letter in an old letter press. Another clerk, with sideburns, was writing in a very large, old ledger.

A picture of a large Hereford bull hung askew on one wall. On another wall were two pictures of race horses—the costumes of the jockeys indicated that their riders were gentlemen. Dust was everywhere. The ticking of a grandfather clock was the only sound.

We waited, expecting one of the clerks to ask our business, but they went on with their hushed work. We waited—we still waited. Finally we tapped on the counter. The clerk with the sideburns carefully blotted his ledger, wiped his pen on a piece of chamois, arose, and asked:

"Is there anything you want?"

We inquired if the manager was in.

"Oh!" said he. "You wish to see Mr. Smithers."

"Mr. Smithers?"

"Yes, Mr. Reginald Smithers, our managing director."

"Would you inform Mr. Reginald Smithers that we would like to see him?"

With a wobegone sort of expression on his face, he exclaimed, "Oh, I am sorry—I am awfully sorry—"

"What are you sorry about?" we asked.

"I am sorry, you can't see Mr. Smithers now."

"Why not?"

"It's tea time, and Mr. Smithers is having his afternoon tea."

In anything but a pleasant tone we said, "Listen, we are here to give your concern some business, but, if you do not want it, we will go elsewhere."

The mention of business did not seem to affect him, but the tone of voice brought the desired result. He said, "Well, it is not quite in order, but I will see what I can do."

The clerk retired to a door at the far end of the office, and timidly rapped and entered.

Shortly he reappeared and beckoned to us, and we entered the private office of Mr. Reginald Smithers.

The atmosphere of this room was the same as the outer office, except that it was more orderly. Over the large fireplace was an oil painting of a gentleman of the late eighteenth century—no doubt the founder of the company.

Mr. Reginald Smithers was a rotund, florid Englishman of the old school, with too-barbered hair and mustache. He radiated pompous dignity. He arose from behind an old table-desk, from which the tea tray had not yet been removed, in order to acknowledge the strictly formal introduction by the clerk, who immediately retired. A strained silence ensued.

We said, "Mr. Smithers, we have a shipment of animals—."

"Could you, by any chance, be any relation to the Bostocks, of the Bostock and Wombwell Menagerie and the Bostock Circus?" interrupted Mr. Smithers.

"Yes. We have a ship—"

"Oh, that is a coincidence. You know, I have visited your show ever since I was a boy."

"Mr. Smithers, we have a—"

"I can remember my first visit as clearly as though it were yesterday—my father took me. I was wearing—"

"Mr. Smithers, we—"

"—kilts, at the time. There was a rhinoceros, with one horn." Then, lapsing into deep meditation, he continued: "Let me see. Did it have one horn, or two horns? I believe it was one—no, perhaps it was two."

Trying to settle the matter we said, "It was a rhinoceros."

"Oh, yes, I'm sure it was!" He rambled on. "Above all I enjoyed the elephants. I recollect, that on my first visit my father purchased an apple which I gave to the elephant. Do you know she fairly grabbed it out of my hand. Really, she enjoyed it so tremendously, I have made it a rule, in fact it became a custom, each year, to take an apple with me and feed it to the elephant."

"That was very thoughtful," we said.

"Yes, yes; I am sure she appreciated it. You know, I believe that she really remembered me. Elephants have such wonderful memories. Her name was Heloise. No—no—let me think. It was Gwendoline, or—"

"Could it have been Lizzie?"

"By jove! That was the name. How extraordinary that you should know it."

He was preparing to continue in this strain when we blurted— "You insure animals, don't you, Mr. Smithers?"

"Of course we do. That is our business."

"Are you positive that you insure all kinds of animals?" we inquired.

"Absolutely! Why, we've been carrying on since 1790."

"That's fine. We have a shipment of wild animals that we—"

"Wild animals?"

"Yes, wild animals—elephants, tigers, orang-outangs, pythons—"

"Oh, I'm sorry! We don't insure wild animals!"

We were about to arise and say, "Well, that's that," and take our leave, when he ponderously continued:

"You know I've often thought that the insuring of wild animals would be quite an adjunct to our business—a sort of affinity, as it were. Yes, we have been considering it for some years, but have never done it."

"But, you don't insure wild animals, now?"

"No. Yet I am not so sure that now is not as good a time to start as any."

At last we were getting somewhere!

"Well, Mr. Smithers, would you consider insuring this shipment of ours?"

"I believe I would," he quickly replied. "Just what animals have you?"

"We have six elephants, four tigers, two leopards, three orang-outangs, six pythons and nine small monkeys, sailing from Singapore to New York, via London."

"My word, a Noah's Ark, what! If you will enumerate again I will write it all down."

When he had finished writing, he looked at us, laid his pen down deliberately, and said:

"There. I think I have everything that is necessary, and I shall be very pleased to let you know about this matter. I'll submit it at the next board meeting."

In consternation, we queried, "The next board meeting?"

"Yes, the next board meeting."

"When is that?"

"Three weeks, come Tuesday."

"Well, that's just too bad. The boat sails Saturday."

"In four days' time? Oh, that is awkward, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is, Mr. Smithers, and unless you can discuss terms now, we are afraid your wild animal insurance will have to go back under advisement."

Again he lapsed into deep meditation. We thought of Atlas, with the weight of the world on his shoulders. At least he said:

"I'm sure that I can't possibly assume the responsibility of insuring the tigers, leopards and monkeys, but, the elephants—that's different—they're sort of quadrupeds—er, very much like horses. As a matter of fact, I don't see any great risk in insuring them. They live very much longer than horses; why, do you know, they live to be a hundred and fifty to two hundred years old?"

Feeling that the question of longevity of elephants might have some bearing on the rate of insurance we did not argue the point.

"Well, then, let us say we will insure the elephants," said Mr. Smithers decisively.

Five of the six elephants were between six and seven feet in height, the other about nine feet high. We stated that we valued each of the five elephants at the same price and the large elephant at double the amount of the smaller ones.

Mr. Smithers drove a hard bargain, but we eventually came to terms, executed the necessary papers and gave him our check. The *Hoyo San* was equipped with wireless, and we told him that we would keep him advised.

THREE days had passed since Raji's sailing when the following wireless arrived.

WIRELESS S. S. HOYO SAN
BOSTOCK,
LONDON, ENG.
ALL TIME BAD SEA KICKUP ANIMALS SHE ALL SICK ELEPHANTS SHE WORSE ONE TOO BAD TRY KEEP THEM.

RAJI

We thought of Mr. Smithers. We hoped this news would not disturb his afternoon tea, yet felt that he should be gently prepared for a shock. We read the wireless to him over the telephone.

He said, "I'm sorry; I don't quite understand—would you repeat?"

We explained that Raji was an Oriental and in his way, he was advising us that they were having very rough seas, all the animals were seasick, the elephants were affected worst, and one elephant might die. Raji was trying to save them.

"Seasick elephants!" Mr. Smithers exclaimed, dumfounded. "I never heard of such a thing!"

"Yes," we informed him, "they are prone to seasickness—and it often proves fatal."

"Well, this is a surprise!" gurgled Mr. Smithers, and after a pause asked, "You'll keep me informed, I hope?"

"Have no doubt; we will keep you informed," we replied.

The following morning sad news lay upon the desk.

WIRELESS S. S. HOYO SAN
BOSTOCK,
LONDON, ENG.
ELEPHANT SMALL SHE GONE DIE CAPTAIN PUT OUTSIDE.

RAJI

Sideburns still was working on the ledger, when we entered the offices of Livestock Insurance, Ltd. Mr. Smithers read Raji's wireless.

His expression was bewildered.

"Oh, my word, this is unfortunate!"

"Yes, it is unfortunate, but to be expected."

"Expected?" He asked in surprise. "Did you expect the elephants to die?"

"Certainly not, but it was something we had to consider as a part of the game. If there had been no possibility of such a contingency, there would have been no need for such insurance."

"Quite so, quite so. Your point is well taken. One out of six— Yes, I suppose it is all in the game. I'll have the treasurer draw a check for you."

"Don't you want a confirmation by the captain?" we inquired.

"That's not necessary; I'll get the papers when the ship arrives."

The next twelve days were interspersed with radiograms from Raji to the effect that the rough weather was continuing, and it was seriously affecting the condition of the animals. We did not refer these to Mr. Smithers, but we rushed to his office upon receipt of the following:

WIRELESS S. S. HOYO SAN
BOSTOCK,
LONDON, ENG.
TYPHOON TERRIBLE COME UP NOW GOT ELEPHANTS SWIM DECK

ONE ELEPHANT SWIM OUTSIDE
TRY KEEP ARM HAVE BROKEN.
RAJI

It was easy to picture the drama that had taken place—shipping crates, smashed by the waves; frantic elephants loose on the deck, the ship buffeted by tremendous seas; Raji striving desperately to repair the crates and anchor the elephants—his arm broken in the effort—one of the elephants washed overboard, as he stood helplessly by. And the storm still raging.

This scene faded from mind and we momentarily forgot everything, even our own financial loss, as we contemplated the probable reaction of Mr. Smithers to this news.

"What? Another?" exploded Mr. Smithers, holding his head as we gave him the wireless. "Oh! This is unfortunate! I'm flabbergasted!" he ejaculated, and sank back into his chair. Distress came to his face as he puzzled over the message, "What does the beggar mean by 'elephants swim deck'?"

"He means that the elephants are awash on the deck and one of them has been washed overboard," we explained.

"Washed overboard? Awash on the deck? What are the elephants doing on the deck?"

"Why, it's customary, during shipment, to place all wild animals on the top deck, generally up forward."

"On the top deck? On the bow of the vessel? Why place them there; why not below?"

"Well, if the animals were below, the cargo might shift and the cages break, permitting them to escape. It might cause a panic and seriously interfere with the operation of the ship."

"I'm amazed," said Mr. Smithers. "I never thought of such a thing. I don't wish to appear ignorant, but would you explain what your man Raji means by 'now got'?"

We explained that Raji had sent his message during the storm and "now got" meant that the typhoon was still raging.

"What? Then it is possible that others might—"

Before he had finished a knock on the door heralded the entrance of Sideburns. He handed us a wireless.

"Your men said this message was important."

Dead silence permeated the atmosphere as we opened the wireless and read:

WIRELESS S. S. HOYO SAN
BOSTOCK,
LONDON, ENG.
GOT ONE ELEPHANT MORE SWIM OUTSIDE CAN NO KEEP.
RAJI

Without a word we extended the message to Mr. Smithers. With one hand on a perspiring brow, the other raised as if to ward off an impending blow, he gasped.

"What, another! Don't tell me there's another!"

We nodded and thrust the message into his hand. He read slowly, then moaned.

"Oh; this is unfortunate! I'm nonplussed! I don't know how I ever will explain this to the board! I hate to think of it!"

We admitted that it was unfortunate and tried to console him with the fact that three of the elephants were still alive. He was reminded that we, too, were suffering a loss, and, while on the subject of loss, he could send us a check at his convenience.

"Quite so; quite so," he conceded.

Bidding him a fond cheerio, we again departed from the private sanctum of Mr. Reginald Smithers.

The *Hoyo San* finally reached Port Said. From this point onward we anticipated no further trouble. But, we had our fingers crossed. None the less the weather jinx hovered over the *Hoyo San*. Three days out of London, the ship ran

into sever, gales and exceptionally cold weather. Then:

WIRELESS S. S. HOYO SAN
BOSTOCK,
LONDON, ENG.
SEA KICKUP GOT ICE ONE ELEPHANT BIG CATCHEM COLD VELLY SICK.

RAJI

"*The big one!*" Mr. Smithers shouted into the phone, as we apprised him. Then he inquired, "Are colds serious?"

"Not always; unless they go into pneumonia," we replied.

"Pneumonia? Do elephants contract pneumonia?" he asked in surprise.

"Oh, yes; and they seldom, if ever, recover from an attack."

"My word!"

Mr. Smithers was rapidly adding to his early knowledge of elephants.

HE GAVE the necessary approval of the arrangements we had made for quartering the elephants at a stable near the docks, during the interval between the arrival of the *Hoyo San*, and the sailing for New York. His approval was necessary because the insurance taken on the elephants covered this period. We advised him that we would have an eminent veterinary with us to meet the ship upon its arrival.

It was a cold, bleak morning as we stood awaiting the arrival of the *Hoyo San*. Eventually she hove in sight and her battered condition was apparent. There were great gaps in the deck rails, a smashed lifeboat hung from a single davit, and two others were missing, swept away.

"She does look like she has had a little what for, doesn't she?" remarked Mr. Smithers as the ship docked.

Raji, as badly battered as the ship, greeted us on board.

"Come all life, this have the worse trip," were his first words.

We didn't wait to exchange commiseration, but hastened with the veterinary to the principal concern of the moment—the big elephant.

Although Raji had piled blankets heavily over her, the elephant stood shivering—a bad sign. The veterinary ordered her immediate removal to the warm quarters we had provided. In our anxiety about the elephant we had forgotten Mr. Smithers, and only became conscious of his presence when he stepped up to the veterinary and very solicitously asked.

"What do you find the matter with her, Doctor?"

"All of the symptoms indicate that she is verging on pneumonia," was the reply of the veterinary.

"Pneumonia?" Mr. Smithers lamented, "you couldn't be mistaken, Doctor?"

Anticipating the necessity of a quick unloading, we had brought with us a very large, strong, teakwood shipping crate. Into this we quickly and carefully loaded the elephant and lowered her to the dock. The veterinary advised that the elephant be walked the short distance to the stable in order that she be given some exercise—that would stir up her circulation. Whether this had been too much for her, we did not know, but she lay down the moment she entered the stall.

She took the veterinary's prescriptions willingly, and she was given brandy and water, sweetened with sugar, as often as she would drink it. She was covered with blankets and straw and we did everything possible to relieve her suffering. The elephant passed away at four the next morning. And the veterinary, Raji and ourselves, retired for a much needed rest.

Mr. Smithers had left us at the dock, to return to the mad rush of business at his office, and was not aware of the death of the elephant until we called upon him.

In his most affable manner he greeted us with:

"How is our patient this morning?"

"She died at four o'clock this morning!"

"Dead?" he asked, as if he had not heard correctly. "Do you mean to say she is actually dead?"

"Permanently dead," we assured him; "the doctor's diagnosis was correct, it was pneumonia."

"Well I never! She seemed to walk all right. I can't believe it," he rambled on.

We silently proffered the veterinary's certificate.

"Well, of course, there can be no doubt upon reading this."

Wearily he rang for Sideburns, to whom he gave the certificate.

"Give these gentlemen a check in settlement of all claims to date. Another beastly elephant has bunged off."

While waiting for the check, we informed Mr. Smithers that the veterinary reported the two remaining elephants as being in excellent condition; whereupon Mr. Smithers brightened perceptibly.

Mournfully, Sideburns approached, bearing our check, which he gave to Mr. Smithers. Mr. Smithers signed the check and passed it to us, remarking musingly—

"I'll have a time of it with the board."

"We don't wish to presume, Mr. Smithers, but, what do you intend to do with the body?" we asked.

"Body! What body?"

"The body of the elephant."

"The body of the elephant!" he exclaimed, astounded. Then, in his broadest accent asserted, "Why, I'm not going to do anything with the bally thing."

"You'd better do something with it; you can't let a dead elephant lie around."

"The disposal of the body is entirely up to you. It's your elephant."

"Oh, no; it *was* our elephant when it was alive, but, since it is dead, it becomes your elephant."

"Oh, that is annoying, but really, I have no use for a dead elephant."

"Neither have we," we hastened to declare.

"I can quite understand that, but it's customary for the relatives to take care of a body."

"The elephant's relatives are back in Siam and we don't think they would be interested."

Mr. Smithers, becoming exasperated, wailed, "What can I do with a dead elephant?"

"We usually bury them, but, of course, you can use your own judgment."

"How do you bury an elephant, may I ask?"

"Oh, buy a plot of ground—"

"A plot of ground, what for?"

"To bury the elephant in; then again, you don't have to buy the ground if you know some one who will allow you to bury it in their garden."

"I don't know any one who would want a dead elephant in their garden."

"We didn't think you would; that is why we suggested your buying a plot of ground."

"Granting, we buy a plot of ground—what then?"

"Then you hire ten or twelve men to dig a hole large enough."

"Ten or twelve men? How long will it take them to do it?"

"It should not require over three days."

"Three days!"

"Yes, then a couple of days to cover the body. Altogether, five days should be enough."

Mr. Smithers, retaining his dignity—

"Twelve men, five days—"

"And, don't forget, it is necessary to hire a very heavy truck, with a windlass, to cart the elephant to the burial ground. You will need some extra men for that."

"You know, this is becoming irksome! Why the necessity of the extra men?"

"Because that elephant weighed about five tons, and now it is dead weight."

Indignantly, Mr. Smithers said, "I

know it is dead weight, I'm well aware of that fact, but, why the extra men?"

"They will have quite a little difficulty in getting the body out of the stable. First they must take down the stall, re-erect it; they will have to take off the doors of the stable, and if the opening is not large enough, take out a part of the building."

Mr. Smithers almost collapsed. "Why can't it be buried at sea?"

"Certainly, that can be done. All you have to do is secure a permit, charter a boat, truck the elephant from the stable to the boat, load it, have the ship put far enough to sea, weight and dump the carcass overboard." We paused to figure. "That will cost only about two hundred pounds."

"Incredible! I never knew elephants could be such a bother!"

"Oh, yes," we pointed out, "you were lucky that the other elephants died at sea."

"Lucky? Well, of course, I've never looked at it in that way. Perhaps you are right. I suppose I'll have to bury this one, but it's not within my province to buy a plot of ground. I'll have to take the matter up with Sir George."

"Sir George?" we questioned.

"Yes, Sir George Washburton. He is our chairman. Would you excuse me while I use the telephone?" He gave a number. Some one answered.

Mr. Smithers, with great dignity said, "Oh, is that you, Hatfield— This is Smithers. I would like to talk to Sir George about a matter of grave importance. . . . I would not disturb him, otherwise . . . quite, I'll hold on . . ."

A short silence, then came "Oh, good morning, Sir George, I'm sorry to bother you. I have a matter of importance about which I am in doubt . . . Well, Sir George, is it within my province to buy a plot of ground . . . to bury an elephant? . . . Sir George, I resent that; I haven't indulged in years. . . . Well—Sir George — I took it upon myself to insure six elephants . . ."

He related the details of all that happened. Evidently Sir George was speaking, for Smithers listened intently and then said, "I'll ask them, Sir George."

Turning to us he asked, "Would you make arrangements for the burial of the elephant if we imburse you for it?"

"Certainly," we replied.

Mr. Smithers, again into the phone; "Yes, Sir George. . . . Quite!"

Consternation suddenly appeared on his face as he listened. He asked "Did I understand you correctly? Did you say a wreath? Yes; yes,. I understand; a wreath—with a card to the elephant's grave? . . . Yes, I'll take it down."

He drew a pad toward him, took his pencil in hand and then; "I'm ready, Sir George. How do you wish the card inscribed?" He repeated and wrote. "In memory of my first and last insurance of elephants, signed Mr. Reginald Smithers. Quite so; very good, Sir George. I'll charge the wreath to my account."

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THE CAMP-FIRE

A meeting place for all.

IN this issue Talbot Mundy begins a a new series of stories about Tros, whose earlier exploits, published in our magazine, had large popularity. Recently these same stories were published as a many-paged novel, now enjoying a wide sale. Mundy sends some interesting notes about his setting and the people of the time.

The basis of my story, "Battle Stations," the essential historical fact is, that on the famous occasion when Cleopatra obeyed Antony's summons to Tarsus, where she entertained him by dissolving an enormous pearl in vinegar, Antony accused her of having sent aid by sea to Cassius and Brutus. Even Antony would hardly be likely to invent such a tale. On the other hand, it is almost inconceivable that Cleopatra should have conspired, with Cassius and Brutus, who had murdered Caesar (her lover and her son's reputed father) against Antony, who was Caesar's friend. She seems to have been able to convince Antony of her good faith without much difficulty, as good faith, that is to say, is weighed in diplomatic scales. This story suggests what her alibi may have been. I believe that it overlooks no accepted historical facts and does not exceed the bounds of probability, or at any rate, possibility, in a period of world-anarchy about which not very much is accurately known.

The following random remarks are in place of foot-notes that would have slowed up the story.

It would be almost impossible to exaggerate the beauty of the City of Alexandria. . . . The ruling class was almost wholly Macedonian and Greek. . . . The Pharos lighthouse was of marble, five hundred feet high, and was said to be visible at sea, in clear weather, from thirty-four miles away. . . . The Alexandrine aristocracy were famous for their bitter wit. They gave every one of any prominence a nickname, always pointed, usually scurrilous, and they were great singers of topical songs. . . . Alexandria was a paradise for women, especially during Cleopatra's reign. . . . A point overlooked or avoided by nearly all historians, including Plutarch, is the change in Cleopatra after Caesar's death. She matured suddenly, from a dare-devil but very religious, intelligent, remarkably well educated girl, into a master-strategist whose war for world-dominion only failed because Antony, rotting his capable brain with drink, could not perceive the paramount importance of command of the sea.

It was common gossip based on medical testimony, which may have been forged (forgeries were as common as bawdy jokes), that Julius Caesar was incapable, for a physical reason, of begetting a child; but the story was quite possibly invented by Caesar's friends to offset the notorious "public secret" that he was the father of Brutus, and as a counterblast to Cleopatra's claim that Caesar was the father of her son.

The truth about the Mysteries is that they died out from beneath, when men became unwilling to submit to the terrific mental discipline, without which they could never qualify for the higher levels of initiation. That is why nothing, literally nothing, is known about the Mystery secrets in spite of intensive research by competent historians; they are impossible to be learned by any one without the "lost key."

Ptolemy Auletes, the "flute-player," was Cleopatra's father. A bibulous, fat little spendthrift, he was driven off his throne by his eldest daughter, Berenice, a worse wastrel than himself. She was probably Cleopatra's half-sister. Ptolemy fled, via Cyprus, to Rome, where he borrowed millions from a money-lender named Rabirius, with which to bribe the Roman senate to reinstate him on his throne by force of arms. By a stroke of unauthorized daring, in which Marc Antony, then a young cavalry officer, achieved distinction, a Roman proconsular official, Gabinius, raided Egypt from Palestine and reinstated Ptolemy, who of course put his daughter Berenice to death. It was a feat of arms not remotely unlike the notorious Jameson raid, only that Gabinius succeeded. Many

of his troops remained in Alexandria, where the pickings were good for a while.

Nearly a third of the population of Alexandria were Jews. Julius Caesar had given them full civic rights, for a substantial cash consideration, although they were still segregated in the eastern quarter of the city. Alexandrine resentment continually and persistently trimmed the Jews' privileges, and this eventually led to bloody and disastrous riots. . . . The prostitutes of Alexandria were even more notorious than those of Rome, the Piraeus, Antioch. . . . The full description of Tros' ship, that he built in Britain, is to be found in my earlier Tros stories that appeared in *Adventure*. They have been published recently as a novel, with the title "Tros of Samothrace." . . . Tomb-robbing, then as now, was an Egyptian major industry.

Little is really known about Arsinoe, Queen of Cyprus, Cleopatra's younger sister. In the story I have given practically all the known facts about her, as far as the time of the story permits; for the rest, I have drawn on imagination, and I propose to take many more liberties with her from time to time. The story of her death in the temple of Artemis in Ephesus is no more credible than the story of Cleopatra's suicide, or than the other one about George Washington and the cherry tree. I propose to have fun with that obvious piece of official mendacity.

The egregious Herod, about whom, too, not much is actually known, is a very intriguing character on whom to hang imagined crimes and escapades. I can promise Tros shall meet him, and shall have the better of the encounter. . . . Punt, whence the spices came, was the modern Somaliland. . . . The Greeks had a trading colony in Socotra as early as 400 B.C. . . . In the whole world's history there have never been any more magnificent soldiers than Jews, when well led. . . . Lars Tarquinius, like Tros, is an imagined character, but there were plenty like him.

In the next story Tros will go after his Northmen.

THE letters from old time members that have come in as a result of my joining in with Camp-Fire again, this time as a reader and member only, have been a source of great pleasure to me and I'd like to answer all of them personally and in full. But I'm working full capacity these days and personal correspondence of all kinds has had to be tucked away for the future. So I'm taking this means of expressing my appreciation. And my good intentions, for sooner or later I hope to answer every one of them.

Meanwhile I'll go right on meeting you here at Camp-Fire.

—ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

THERE'S no question about the evil dispositions of black panthers, says Gordon MacCreagh, but all is still not known about that breed of hellcat. He writes:

There is an old argument as to whether a black is a freak of melanism or whether it is a breed. The majority of scientific opinion claims nowadays that blacks are sports. But old Carl Hagenbeck, for whom I was collecting in them thar Malayan parts, always insisted that they were a breed, and he spent much time and money trying to get hold of blacks to see whether he could prove his point. In fact, the high price of blacks was largely boosted beyond all sensible needs by his avid demands for such specimens. Old Carl's theory was bolstered largely by the prevailing evil temper of blacks. Why would a color freak, he would maintain, be any worse tempered than a normal spot? And if one, by chance, should, why would all blacks have such implacable tempers? The fact, according to him, argued a distinct species. Furthermore, nobody had ever found a litter consisting of a spot and a black together. And further again, blacks are always smaller than spots.

He had a lot of good talking points, had old Carl. But the scientific gents say that blacks are sports. Maybe they're right. But they never convinced Carl Hagenbeck.

HENRY F. CHURCH, who wrote "Mud," which ought to strike a reminiscent note with many former doughboys, gives us the following brief account of a varied life. He makes his first appearance as a member of our Writers' Brigade.

Although somewhat varied in scope, there has been nothing outstanding in my personal history. It stacks up about like this:

Born January 28, 1888. Reared on a stock farm in Northern Virginia. Started to earn own living at fifteen. Worked two winters as mate on an oyster boat in the "Kettle Bottoms" of the lower Potomac, and one winter on a fishing crew. Also took a number of

other jobs to get coffee and cakes and a spare-time education, including cook on a lumber sloop; member of a maritime salvage crew; dynamiter; life-guard; prize-fighter; horse wrangler; prospector; linesman; foreman; power line construction; newspaper reporter; cartoonist; draftsman and statistician.

Studied art between jobs and worked at illustrating until 1916, when I enlisted for Mexican Border service.

While celebrating the entry of the United States in the World War, I joined the Navy by mistake and served as a gob until discharged to reenlist in the Army. During the World War I held every enlisted grade, from buck to top sergeant, in a mounted signal corps company, until commissioned as second lieutenant of infantry and attached to 113th Infantry as regimental signal officer.

Gassed in action in Vosges mountains September 1, 1918, while repairing overhead telephone wires. Went A.W.O.L. from field hospital to rejoin outfit in Argonne. Again sent to hospital and discharged in May, 1919. At present hold reserve commission in rank of major.

Came to Charleston, S. C., in 1923, as Assistant director of the Office of Port Development, which office I now direct.

Have disposed of more than three thousand illustrations, and have placed upward of four hundred factual articles, both as ghost-writer and over my own name; plus one technical book on drafting.

I am married and have two girls and a boy ranging from six to twelve. Have no special hobbies outside of landscape painting and poker.

FOSTER-HARRIS has a few words about his story "Can Roller" in this issue.

Oklahoma City, Okla.

Well, since several years ago, on occasion of my first yarn in *Adventure*, I stood up at Camp-Fire and Truthfully Explained All, I take it you don't want me to do so again. (I said, you'll remember, that I did not steal that hoss. No matter what the jury decided, the truth was, the horse just thought I was a lodge brother of his and kindly took me home.)

But, since "Can Roller" deals with such matters, I will claim to know an Indian or two and a little bit about boom oil towns, their John Laws and their shooters, can, oil or otherwise. I was born in the Chickasaw Nation, back when. Lived in New Mexico several years. And I've been at least exposed to oil game atmosphere nearly all my life.

Some day, I think, the boom oil towns will be just as glamorous and popular a locale for fiction as are the vanished trail towns. Because, by gum, the oil camps were just as gaudy, loud and gory as the cow burgs. They were the direct successors of the oldtime Dodge Cities and Abilenes. Yes and quite frequently, the same dramatic characters moved in both scenes.

Cowhands turned oil workers. Frontier marshals became oil town John Laws. The tinhorns, the dancehall gals, the gunfighters—they were all there.

Time and again one square, hard fighting John Law held a boom oil town in hand by his own prestige; just as I have my young officer doing. Yeah and on the other hand, plenty times, weak or crooked John Laws let their roaring-gold camps turn into—

But I better hush. After all, you didn't ask for an essay or something on boom oil towns. It's mighty pleasant, being in *Adventure* and invited to Camp-Fire again. To the good company—*Salud!*

BASIL WOON, of La Quinta, California, tells us how Tex O'Reilly, who wrote the Pecos Bill stories, was sat upon by a Mexican garrison and how some smallpox "shots" stopped some real bullets.

This is just a line to thank you for the new *Adventure*—or rather, the old magazine you have brought back to life.

I've read *Adventure*, except for years abroad when I couldn't get it, since early 1912, I think. I figured in Camp-Fire, too, once or twice eighteen or twenty years ago. That was when I first met Tex O'Reilly, at Nogales, where he was with Bill Noonan helping Maytorena get munitions in exchange for cattle, and at Presidio, where he was sent by the A.P. to wait for Villa to take Ojinaga, across the river. Villa was so long getting there that Tex decided to take the town himself. He went across the river and up the bluff and got as far as the third Plaza before the Mexican garrison got him down and sat on him. An American doctor got him out next day just as they were going to shoot him. The doctor had the only vaccination ampoules in the Big Bend and there was smallpox in Ojinaga. They had to do what he said. Tex at that time wrote magnificent short stories but another war started somewhere and he quit writing for a time.

I'd been reading *Adventure* about a year when I first went to New York and looked in at the offices in the Butterick building. A tall, red-headed fellow, with a perpetual air of hurry about him, saw me. Hoffman was busy. It was Sinclair Lewis, who was then assistant editor. Lewis took me to a meeting of the Adventurer's Club that night at the old Cafe Boulevard and I was made a member—that was in 1913, I think. Might have been '12. I remember Talbot Mundy sat at our table and I had to make a talk—the first speech of my life—and was I scared! My pin-feathers were still only too painfully visible.

Before you took charge *Adventure* had dug up one real writer, rather on the Mundy order, Perry Adams. I met him just after the war in London and know he knew his India stuff. I thought his tales were fine.

Again—sincere and grateful thanks—and I am not a letter-to-the-editor-man by habit.

A GENTLEMAN with a very straight face, who keeps a general store, has a bear in a cage. It is a home-made cage, built on the ground like a chicken run, and the wire came from a roll of stock-fencing. The bear came from Montana, is two-thirds grown, and a heavy-weight wrestler might be able to lift it, if the bear permitted, but perhaps not. It's a pretty good-sized bear.

In fact, you'd think that if the bear took a full-arm swipe at the wire, it could break loose.

"No," said the bear's owner, "he never tried to get out, so I guess he won't. I guess he could if he wanted to, but he don't try it."

There was a hole pawed away in the ground under the wire. It wasn't large enough for the bear to crawl through, but about the right size for a small boy.

"He dug it," the man said to me, with a touch of pride. "There's a pup around here that likes to play with the bear, and the bear dug that hole so the dog could come into the cage. The dog comes in there every day, and it's nothing to see them both asleep in there."

Ah, well. I kept the man talking, all the while keeping an eye out for the dog.

"No," he said, "he don't dig it any deeper. He got it deep enough for the pup, and that seems to satisfy him."

I took the gentleman back into his store and invited him to a bottle of pop. Later I went behind the store again to see if the dog had arrived, but it had not. That, of course, proves nothing.

Now on the face of it, this would seem to be just a good little yarn to be told, with a straight face, to a stranger. But having talked with the man at length, and watched him suspiciously all the time, I'm not so sure. I'm not at all sure. He might have been telling the truth.

There have been some strange friendships among animals. Likely we have some readers who know about bears. I hope some of them will write me whether this is possible, or whether I ran into a first-class and all-time champion leg-puller.

I do recall one bear story I know to be true, though it sheds no light on the above problem. A New York City "sportsman" stopped at a roadside stand in Maine where a bear was kept in a cage to draw trade. The big gun-bearer from the big city already had a deer, with the help of a guide. He paid one hundred twenty-five dollars for the bear, shot it in the cage, and triumphantly drove away with the hide. No doubt it is a good story he tells his friends when he points to his bear rug—the charging beast with snarling fangs, and how he picked up his rifle (a bad moment there, but it's funny how cool you can be sometimes in a bad jam, and you wouldn't know you had it in you until that moment comes) and shot it right between the eyes. Well, the fellow did shoot it right between the eyes, and the bars of a cage make a great place to steady a rifle.

But about the bear and the dog—I don't know, and I hope some reader will tell me.

H. B.

Ask Adventure

PERHAPS pemmican should be classed with caviar—a rare luxury.

Request:—I have been trying for some time to find out where I can get several pounds of pemmican. I tasted some several years ago that came from the North and would like to get some more.

Can you tell me where I may obtain about five pounds of pemmican made from wild meat?

WILLIAM F. TAYLOR, So. Mountain, Pa.

Reply by Mr. S. E. Sangster:—Pemmican was originally made of smoked buffalo meat. Whether there is any such, made of buffalo meat, today available I doubt. The demand for pemmican has ceased and therefore its manufacture commercially likewise ceased. However, I rather believe there is to be had so-called pemmican.

I would suggest your communicating with the following who can possibly supply the amount you wish or can advise you where it can be obtained—

Abercrombie & Fitch, New York City.

Manager, Hudson's Bay Company, Winnipeg, Canada.

J. B. Harkin, Commissioner of Dominion Parks, Ottawa, Canada.

(Mr. Harkin, whose job includes the supervision of Canada's buffalo herds at Wainwright, N. Alberta, might be able to advise you as to the real buffalo pemmican and if any is available).

A MOST comprehensive letter on cruising down the Mississippi.

Request:—I am much interested in the possibility of cruising the courses of the Illinois, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers throughout practically the entire length of their navigable channels in the next year or two. On these cruises I would like to take with me my wife and three children varying in ages from ten to sixteen years.

I do not care to make these cruises in any very great luxury, but do desire that they be made with considerable comfort to all concerned.

I know nothing whatever about river cruising, but had the idea that one might be able to pick up either by lease or purchase a comfortable houseboat with an inboard motor, electric lights, etc., for this purpose.

I would appreciate any information you could give me as to the type of boat best adapted, the possibility of securing a desirable craft and the probable cost if purchased or leased, the probable cost of operation, the best type of power plant, and approximately how much of a crew would be required for navigating, caring for the boat and for cooking and maid service.

I would also appreciate any further information which you could give me as to whether or not a licensed pilot for these cruises would be required, whether or not charts for these rivers are obtainable and if so where and at what price.

I would also like to include the Missouri River and other large tributaries of the lower Mississippi and the Ohio such as the Tennessee, Cumberland, Warrior, Red River and any others that might make desirable cruising territory.

Will you also give me information as to the hunting and fishing along these streams and as to what restrictions there are on tying up the boat at night or at other times along the banks of the stream?

As you can undoubtedly see from the foregoing, I am as big a "greenhorn" on this subject as possible, but I have always had a desire to familiarize myself with the inner-water routes of the Central United States.

GEORGE G. SEAMAN, Chicago, Ill.

Reply by Mr. Raymond S. Spears:—You plan a perfectly wonderful experience. I've

been several thousand miles in the navigable waters you name via skiff, shanty-boat, steamboat, launch, etc. But I suggest that instead of depending on any one answerer, that you make up a working library to cover the scope of your project—and by prevision-adventure of the routes based on the authoritative documents, maps and books available, prepare yourself for the unimaginable experiences and discoveries.

First; Superintendent of Public Documents, Washington, D. C., for catalogues of documents covering each river, each state, game, fish, fur, etc. Thus, too, obtain Mississippi River Commission, Vicksburg, Miss., "Maps, General and the History of River Improvements" (not exact title—$6.) Reports of Missouri and Mississippi River Commissions —10 years, say.

"Shantyboat," D. Appleton-Century Co., 35 West 32nd St., New York, N. Y.

Also, "Driftwood"—I wrote this—Appleton-Century Co.—fact in fiction.

The Union Library Association, 367 Fourth Ave., N. Y. City—get from them "Mostly Mississippi," by Speakman, "Mississippi Steamboating," by the Quicks, "The Outlaw Years," by Coates.

You will want specially reports of U. S. Fisheries Commission, Forest Service, U. S. Army Engineers; Washington, D. C.

The reports of the Louisiana Conservation Commission, New Orleans, La.—all you can lay hands on—Annual, Fur-Bearing Mammals, Birds, Game, Fish, etc.

You'll want standard books for identification of flowers, birds, mammals ("Field Book of North America Mammals," Anthony, G. P. Putnam Sons, 2 West 45th Street, N. Y., N. Y., and the several Reed and other guides; Doubleday, Page & Co., Garden City. N. Y.)

Your own and your family's preference will develop in this fairyland of science and adventure and experience. When you have read among you half a ton—literally—you'll need no advice from any one. I read 50,000 pages of Commission reports—not one dull after tripping the rivers. Even Weather Bureau flood accounts, run-off measurements are fascinating.

You'll find three or four tons of books relating to the rivers in Chicago second-hand book stores. I've seen them on the shelves. Go into them. *All* phases. Even the stories of the bridges are big.

Better defer selection of the boat till you've studied the house-boat literature—Florida, Hudson river, Inland Waterway types. Forest and Stream printed such a book "Houseboats and Houseboating"—get Union Library above to find a copy, other out-of-print books.

Type of river cruisers:

Stern paddle-wheel, shoal draft, Diesel, or twin-screw,—Not over 30-inches for low water and tributary streams.

Geo. A. Zerr, Crafton P. O. Ingram, Pa. (Ask Adventure). He could give you all steamer, gasoline, license, other data—crews and wages, and, especially, tell you about obtaining by purchase, lease or building. When you decide about what boat you want—houseboat or modified river craft—you are likely to find that you could build it in one of the river yards—several at Point Pleasant, on the Ohio, for example; or you could find a good one laid up by the times in Florida (Yacht and houseboat brokers in New York, St. Petersburg, Palm Beach would know what is available). A boat to suit your needs could be brought to the Mississippi from Florida—

Wharfage is charged at many landings—chiefly to keep the river shanty-boaters at a distance. But mostly you would anchor in the eddies or reverse-currents, come to banks where you pleased—

River channels change with every tide.

The cost will be what you make it. A shanty-boater figures about 10 cents a meal. His boat costs as little as $15 for a scow with a shack. A sporting trip, $100 house-boat, an outboard motor, perhaps $100 outfit—six months' one-way trip down, $3.50 a week each, up.

You'll need to make sure of the crew—Kerr can suggest as to this. Not only are the streams treacherous—so are the humans. The Missouri is worst, perhaps—Arkansas, Red, Yazoo pretty bad to downright mean. But a month or two and you'll have the hang of it.

The size of the boat—perhaps 60 feet long, 12 to 15 feet wide. Blasts of wind, especially summer, suggest rather a low structure. But the navigable streams—10,000 miles—carry in normal water up to hundreds of feet long. Store boats, small packets, tributary service up to 100 feet long. With such a large boat, you would include a tender for side trips of days or weeks duration—12 to 18-inch draft. And, of course, skiffs with outboards. I should question anything over 100 feet and a much smaller craft has advantages.

The tendency is to over-size and overload. The currents are about 3 to 8 miles, with crossings somewhat faster. The simpler the better is the rule.

A NAME to conjure with—Ali Pasha.

Request:—I am doing some research work on Ali Pasha of Albania, but have encountered considerable difficulty in locating material. I have tried to follow the bibliography listed in the Encyclopaedia Britannica but have been unable to locate Francois C. H. L. Pouqueville's "Voyage en Moree, à Constantinope, en Albanie", etc. There is mention of an English translation of this work having been published in 1816. Have you any idea where I may gain access to this translation?

Any information you can give me regarding Ali Pasha will be greatly appreciated. Who was the mother of his three sons, Mukhtar, Sulaiman and Vely? Did he have any favorite daughters? Can you give me the names of any of his wives? How did his mother, the fighting Khamko, come to her death? I understand that he had a favorite nephew named Mahmud. Do you know anything about this nephew and which of his parents was related to Ali? Who was the Grand Vizier during the reign of Mahmud II, at the time Ali met his death, and what was the extent of Ali's domains when he was at the height of his power? Can you also explain to me the significance and difference between Pasha of two tails and Pasha of three tails, also, if there is such a title as Pasha of one tail?

—E. NYVELT, Los Angeles, Calif.

Reply by Mr. Beda von Berchem:—Before I shall do my level best to fill your somewhat extensive order, let me be very frank with you: You state that you are doing research work on Ali Pasha. This illustrious rascal has been written up from every possible angle and in every imaginable tongue, Turkish and Albanian included. Do you really mean to tell me that the excellent library of my home town hasn't anything bearing on his life and exploits? That doesn't seem possible, does it? I'm giving you a list of publications which contain everything you wish to know and then I'm going to answer your questions, as far as I know the answers.

Pouqueville's book was published in English, in London, by R. Phillips & Co. (1820). There are copies in the New York and Boston Libraries and the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. (Congressional Library, in the vernacular!) That book doesn't contain much about Ali. Spiridon Gopcevic's "History of Montenegro and Albania" contains a very good summary of Ali's activities. "Romantic Rascals", by Charles J. Finger, published 1927 by Robert M. McBride & Co., N. Y., gives a whole chapter to Ali. "Ali Pasha, Tyrant of Albania" (in Turkish) by Ibrahim Mansour Effendi is the best book on Ali. There is, by the way, a German translation, published by Robert Lutz, Stuttgart, Germany. These books ought to be in the Los Angeles Library and if they are not, the librarian in charge ought to be able to get them for you.

Now then, to our hero:

Ali Pasha, also called Tepedileni, was born at Teplen or Tepelen, in the northern part of the (then) Turkish Vilayet Yanina about 1741. He came of an illustrious family. His grandsire, father's side, also known as Ali Pasha, was killed in action in 1716, during the siege of Corfu, leading his division to the attack. He was a Pasha of two horses . . . tails. He had three sons; the youngest, Veli Bey, was Ali's papa. His brothers chased him from the paternal "han" and Veli took it so to heart that he became a "cleft", a highwayman and brigand. He soon collected a powerful band, returned with it to Tepelen, caught his brothers in their homes, set fire to it and burnt them alive. Soon thereafter he died and left two widows. One, Khamko (I've seen it spelled Chanko, Kanco) was the mother of Ali and his sister Chainitza. She was the mother of Mahmud, by the way.

Khamko was a cruel, vindictive, ambitious, intriguing and somewhat poisonous lady. She possessed all the rascality which she passed on to her son. Her career cannot be written down in these pages. She was worse than Poppaea and all Alexandrine hetaerae taken together. She was behind most of her son's early deviltry and the inhabitants of Chormovo and Kardiki, all Mussulmen, captured her and her daughter one day, while Ali was away from home. For two months the two women passed from hand to hand among the men of the communities mentioned, until the Bey of Kardiki felt so sorry for them that he liberated them and sent them home. What Ali did to these two villages was plenty. Khamko died a natural death at Tepelen, about 1766. In 1765 Ali married Emineh, daughter of the Pasha of Delvino. She was the mother of the three sons you mentioned. The other sons of Ali would make a good-sized battalion.

I'm sorry, I cannot tell you who was Grand Vizier at the time of Ali's demise, in 1822. Neither could I give you a correct answer as to the extent of his domains, then. They probably included all of Albania, a large part of Epirus and several Greek vilayets of the Ottoman Empire. It is said that he

even lorded it over some lands in Anatolia.

The significance of the horsetails of former Turkish Pashas is simply this: Pasha itself was the title of the highest military and civil officers of the Porte up to about 1830 or 1831 when Mahmut II abolished the horse tails. There were three classes:

One tail: Military title Mirilava or Brigadier General, Civilian title Miriniram, a high official.

Two tails: Military title Ferik or Division Commander, Civilian title Beglerbeg.

Three tails: Military title Mueshir or Field Marshal, Civilian title Vezir (Engl. Vizier).

The republic maintained the military ranks of Mirliva, Farik and Muesir, all with the title or predicative of Pasha.

Under the Sultans, up to 1830, the Pashas were entitled to have a staff with their respective (horse) tails carried ahead of them wherever they went.

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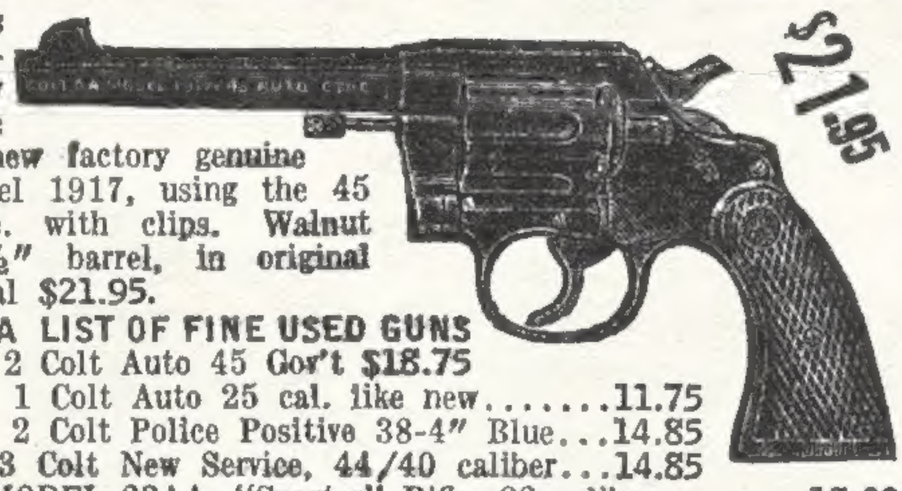

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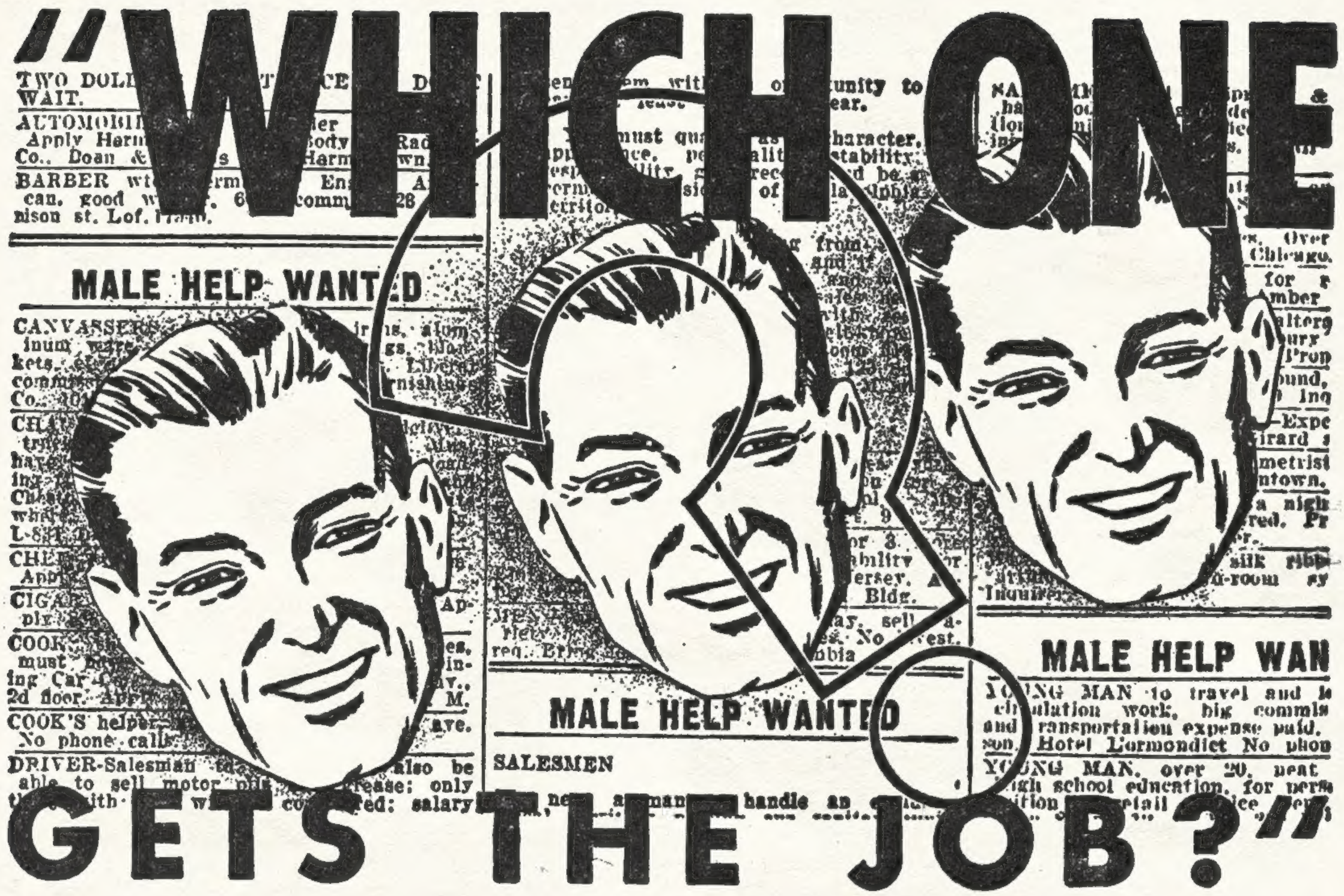

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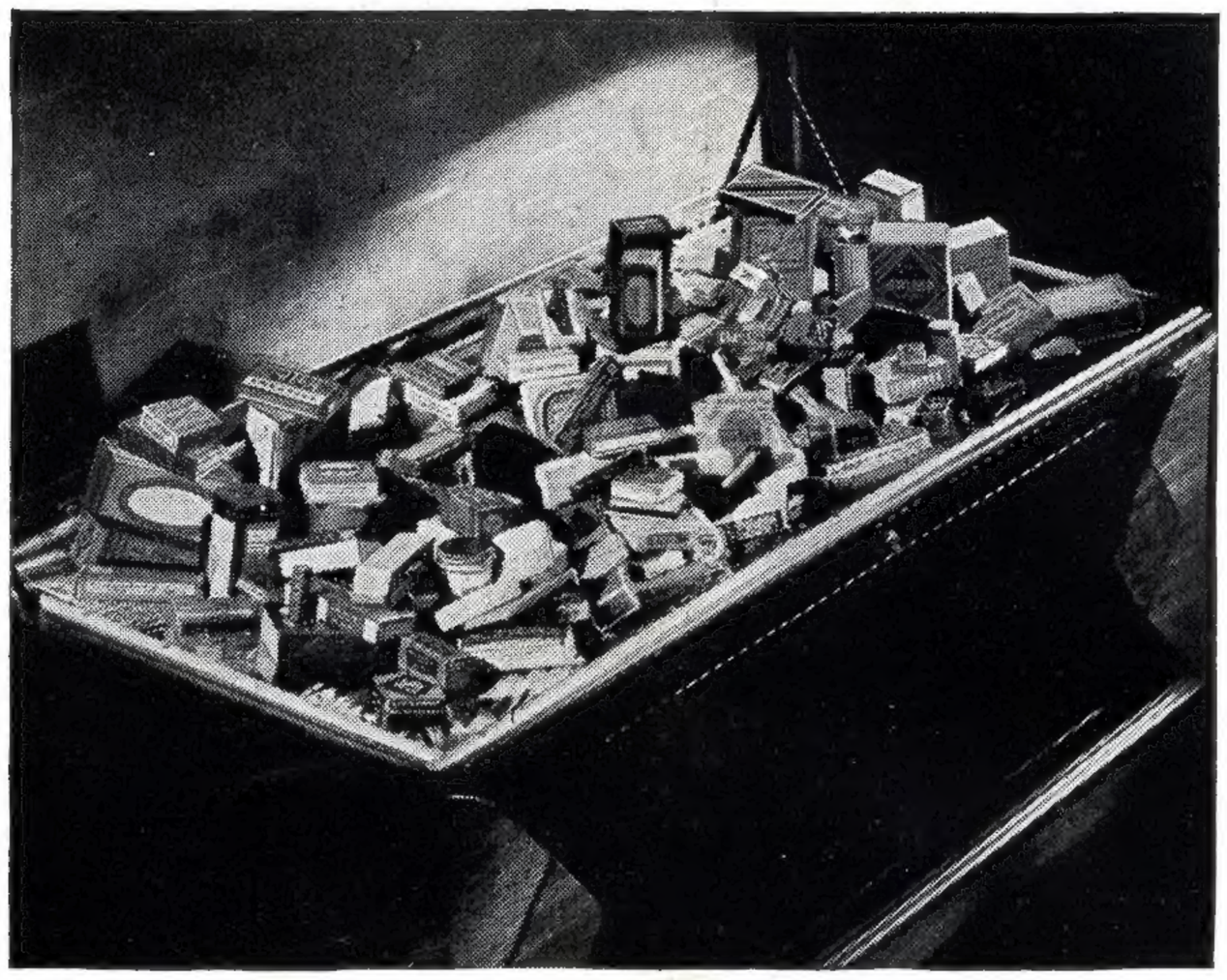
– it tells you why you shouldn't try an untried laxative



AT the Ex-Lax plant is a big box containing 522 little boxes. Each one contains a laxative that "hoped" to imitate Ex-Lax, and get away with it.

For 28 years we have seen them come and seen them go . . . while Ex-Lax has gone along growing bigger and bigger year by year . . . simply by giving satisfaction to millions of people who turned to it for pleasant, painless, thorough relief from constipation.

WHY EX-LAX HAS STOOD THE TEST OF TIME

Ex-Lax is a chocolated laxative . . . but it is so much more than just chocolate flavor and a laxative ingredient. The *way* it is made . . . the satisfaction it gives . . . these things apparently can't be copied. They haven't been yet!

Of course, Ex-Lax is thorough. Of course, it is gentle. It won't give you stomach pains, or leave you feeling weak, or upset you. It won't form a habit . . . you don't have to keep on increasing the dose to get results.

AND . . . THAT "CERTAIN SOMETHING"

So many imitators have tried to produce a chocolated laxative that would equal Ex-Lax. But they couldn't. Why? Because Ex-Lax is more than just a chocolated laxative. Because the exclusive Ex-Lax process gives Ex-Lax a "certain something"—a certain ideal action that words just can't explain and that *no other laxative has*. But once you try Ex-Lax, you'll know what we mean, and nothing else will ever do for you.

Ex-Lax comes in 10c and 25c boxes—at any drug store. If you would like to find out how good it is . . . at our expense . . . just mail the coupon below for a free sample.

MAIL THIS COUPON—TODAY!

EX-LAX, Inc., P.O. Box 170
Times-Plaza Station, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Y55 Please send free sample of Ex-Lax.

Name .....

Address .....

.....

When Nature forgets—remember

EX-LAX

THE CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE

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